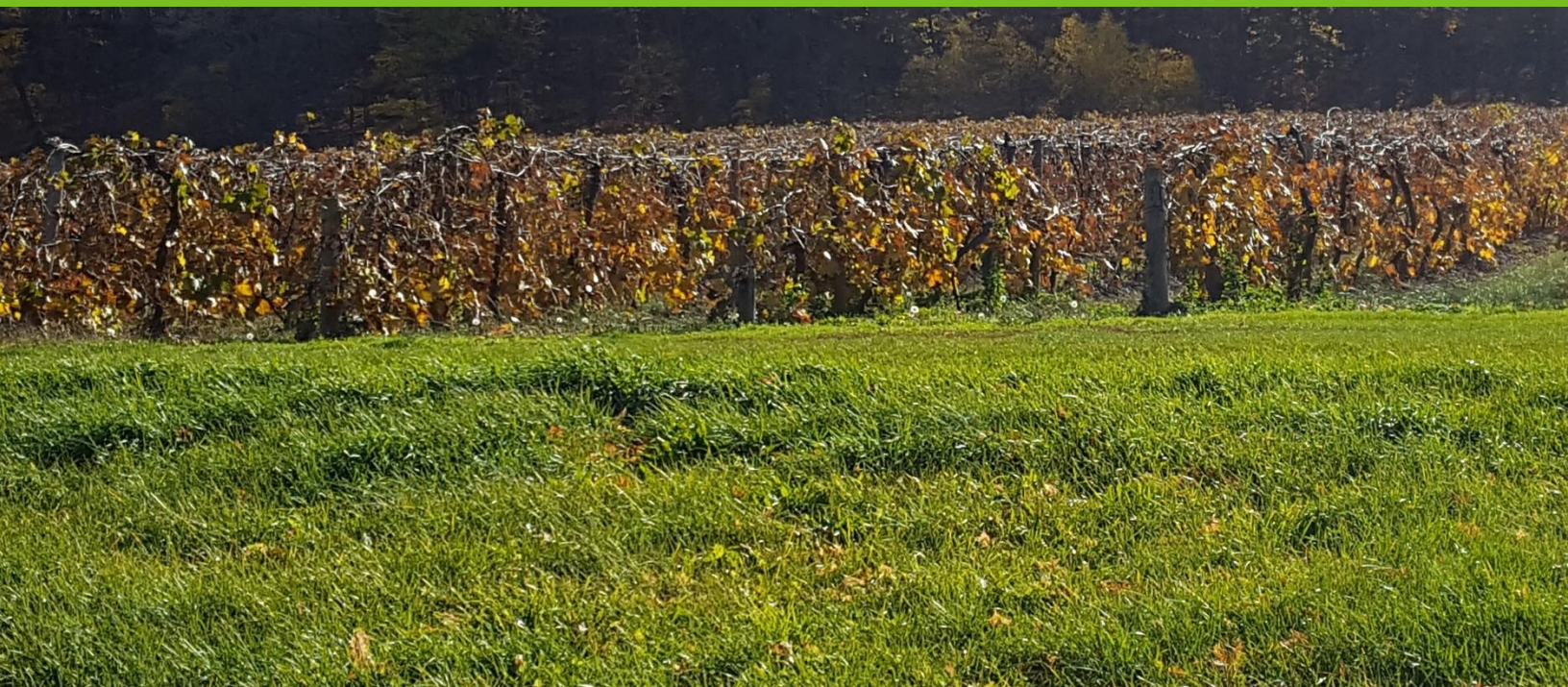




NIAGARA COUNTY

**AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND
PROTECTION PLAN**

SEPTEMBER 2018



NIAGARA COUNTY

AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2018

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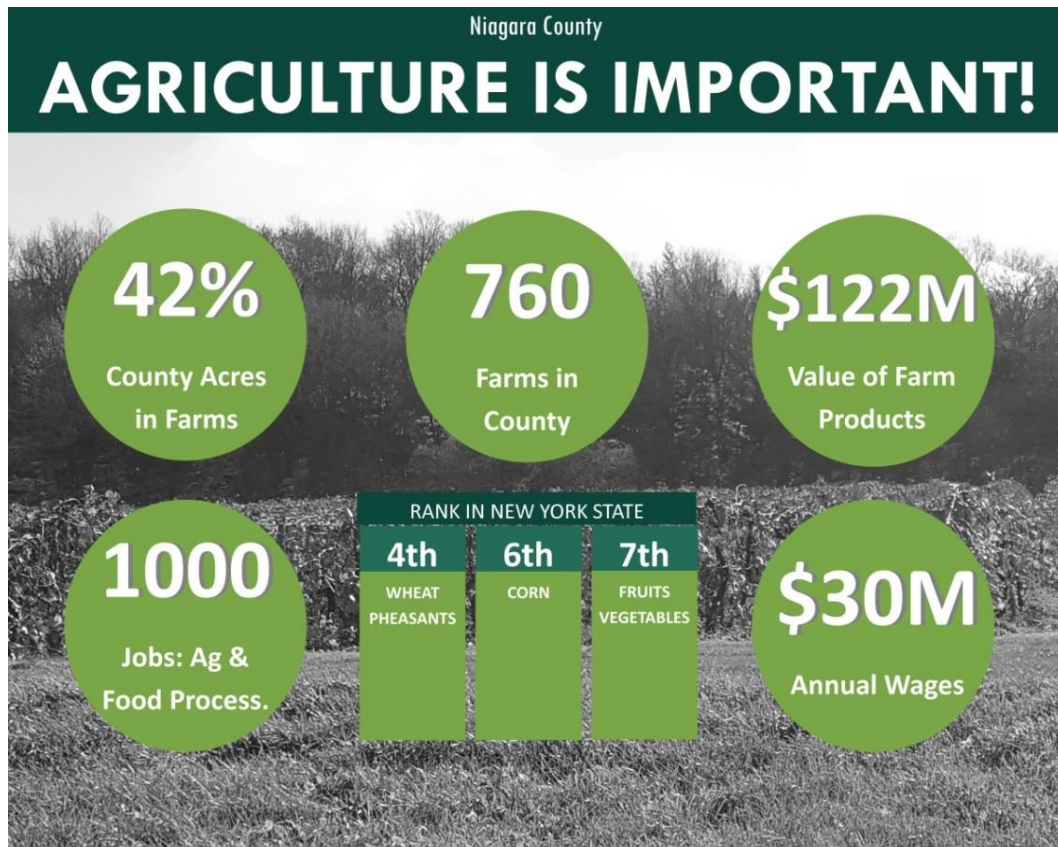
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agriculture is one of Niagara County's most important economic development sectors. More than 760 farms in Niagara County generate a market value of more than \$122 million in sales and employ approximately 1,000 individuals. Its high quality soils and relatively moderate Upstate climate along Lake Ontario help to make it one of the most productive agricultural areas in New York State.

To protect and grow Niagara County's agricultural economic base, the County has developed this Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. The updated plan provides information on existing agricultural and farming conditions in the County and also includes recommendations to protect, grow, and diversify the County's agricultural and food economy while supporting new and emerging agriculture related businesses.

The overall purpose of the plan is to increase the economic viability of agriculture in Niagara County by assessing and providing recommendations for the following:

- Production agriculture;
- Agritourism & local and regional food markets;
- Attracting new farmers and retaining existing ones; and
- Marketing and Education.



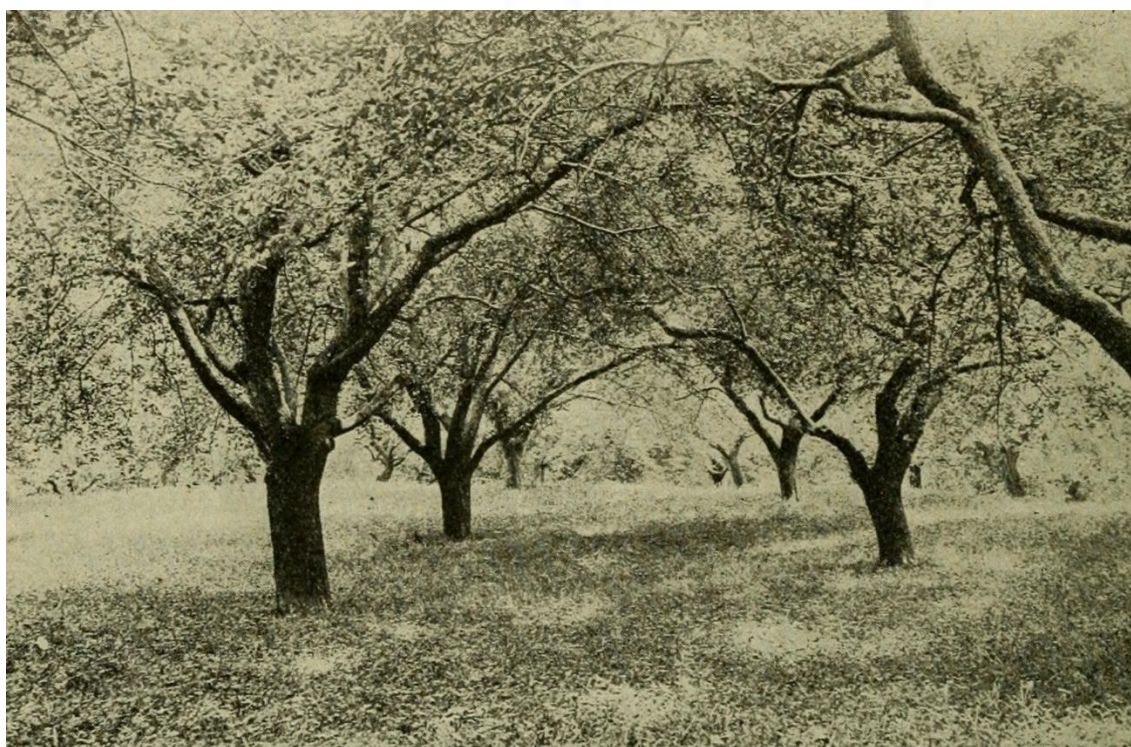
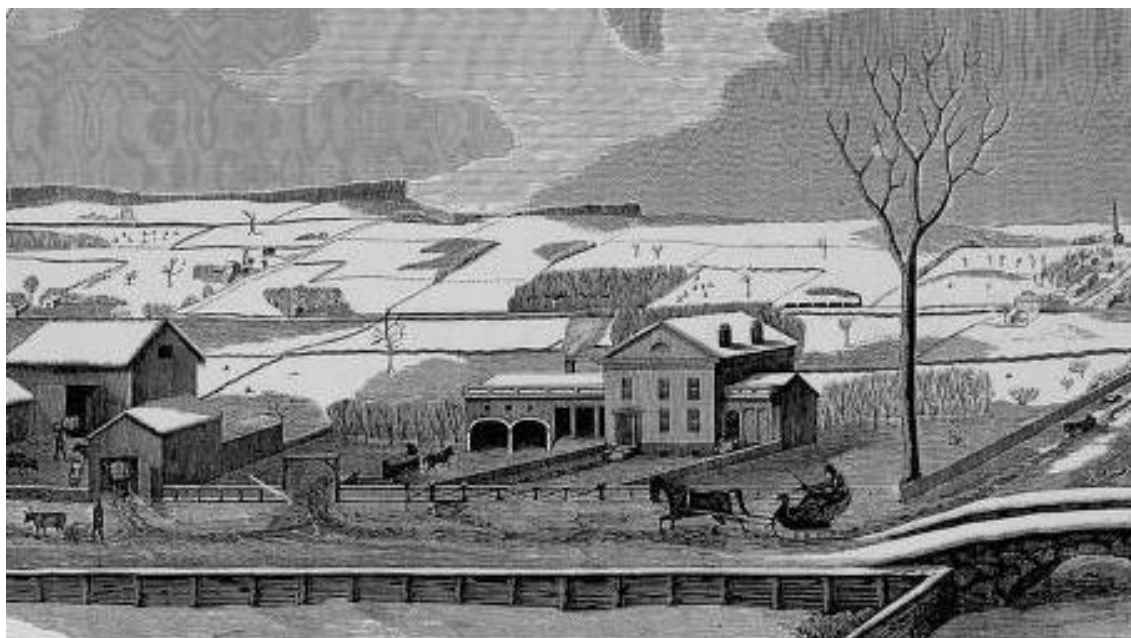


Fig. 29.—An old story: An example of an orchard in which the trees are crowding each other and are now "fighting it out" Area in apples.— The entire area of the county comprises 522 square miles, or 334,080 acres, with an average of 46 acres in apples to the square mile. Furthermore, since there are 924,086 trees in the county, and since the average number of trees per acre is 38.2 it follows that there are about 24,190 acres in apples. This means that 7.2 per cent of the area of the county is planted to apple orchards. About three- fourths of the orchards are in the northern half of the county.

Top: A rendering of a farm from *A History of Niagara County* published in 1887.

Bottom: Photo and text from *An Inventory of Apple Orchards in Niagara County* published by Cornell University in 1909.

Niagara County adopted its first Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan in 1999. That plan documented agricultural land uses, the economic impact of agriculture, identified the agricultural areas to be preserved and analyzed conversion pressure. The plan included a myriad of economic development, policy, farmland protection, education, promotion and public relations strategies. The 1999 plan was an effective one and many of its recommendations were implemented.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A significant amount of public and stakeholder outreach effort was undertaken as part of the Niagara Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. Outreach efforts included:

- Steering Committee meetings
- A tour of area farms
- Attendance and promotion of the plan at two Cornell Cooperative Extension events – the Annual Fair and the Annual Dinner
- Focus groups
- Farmer and Stakeholder interviews
- Consumer survey
- Farmer and Landowner surveys



A farmer explaining issues and opportunities in agriculture during the Farm Tour

A VISION FOR AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A Vision Statement was developed by the Steering Committee to provide a framework and filter for future decisions and actions related to agricultural and farmland protection in Niagara County. The Steering Committee wanted the statement to recognize the following:

- Agriculture is a key component of Niagara County's economy and future economic development activities;
- Protection of agricultural and farmland is important to retain opportunities for economic development and to provide opportunities for jobs; and
- Promotion of current agricultural activities and future opportunities in agriculture will facilitate the long term viability of agriculture in Niagara County.

Niagara County's agricultural industry will thrive by providing opportunities for economic development, protecting agricultural lands, and promoting the unique and diverse agricultural products available locally.

The Vision Statement was supported by the following goals:

- **Opportunity:** Niagara County will provide economic development opportunities to support agriculture and farm related businesses.
- **Awareness:** Niagara County will promote the quality, variety, and importance of farm products and agriculture locally and regionally.
- **Protection:** Niagara County will protect land for agricultural production.
- **Viability:** Niagara County will facilitate the long term economic viability of agriculture.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Recommendations were developed for each of the goals established by the Steering Committee. The number of recommendations is limited so they are achievable over the next decade and also have an impact on Niagara County's agricultural economic development.

Recommendation		Timeframe	Responsibility
O-1:	Increase the number of meat processing facilities in Niagara County.	2-5 years	CCE & Niagara County DED
O-2:	Establish or attract a cooperative produce distribution enterprise.	2-5 years	CCE & Niagara County DED
O-3:	Create an Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator in Niagara County.	2 years	Niagara County
O-4:	Integrate agritourism into Niagara County tourism activities, programs and direct consumer sales.	1 year	Destination Niagara USA
A-1	Launch a Family Farm Day in Niagara County that would include farm tours, rides, food/beverage tastings and other activities.	1 year	CCE
A-2	Open a Farmers' Market and Taste NY retail location near the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute in the Niagara Falls Tourist district.	5 years	Destination Niagara USA
A-3	Develop a comprehensive ag-tourism marketing and branding campaign.	1-2 years	CCE, Destination Niagara USA
P1	Develop a brochure and companion training component for local municipalities and farmers on how to update zoning/land use controls to promote agricultural economic development and protect valuable farmland.	1 year	CCE, Niagara County DED, municipalities
P2	Apply for Farmland Protection Implementation grants from New York State Ag & Markets to facilitate the purchase of development rights or conservation easements.	Ongoing	Niagara County & municipalities
V1	Establish an agricultural packaging and processing program at Niagara Community College.	2-5 years	Niagara Community College
V2	Obtain funding for small/new farmers.	Ongoing	CCE, Niagara County IDA, SBDC, municipalities
V3	Advocate for robust funding to ensure Cornell Cooperative Extension can enhance its effectiveness.	Ongoing	CCE

Notes: Recommendations in **bold** are high priority projects; CCE – Cornell Cooperative Extension, DED – Department of Economic Development, IDA - Industrial Development Agency, SBDC - Small Business Development Center.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The adoption of the Agriculture Plan is a commitment to a coordinated vision for the future of agriculture in Niagara County. The Plan's success is measured through committed use by the Farmland Protection Board, Cornell Cooperative Extension, regional and local economic developers, elected officials, boards and committees, municipal employees, residents and the farmers themselves.

- Elected officials will use the plan to learn about the vision of the agriculture and farmland protection and ways they can support farming through increased knowledge and understanding as well as by adopting local codes and ordinances to support agriculture.
- In specific areas of the county where conversion of farmland is a threat, local zoning and planning boards can use the plan to measure the desirability of development applications by their conformity with plan goals. They can also recommend policies and procedures that actively assist those projects that comply with the plan's goals and strategies and discourage those projects that do not.
- Working closely with developers, economic developers can target investment with projects that promote plan objectives and increase agricultural activity and employment in agricultural enterprises.
- Many municipal employees will find the plan useful when interpreting legislative mandates, making administrative decisions, enforcing development-related codes and prioritizing work efforts. They will use the plan as a source of pertinent local information for grant applications and support applications for funding that support farming and the farm economy here.
- Finally, local residents will use the plan as a reference when making residential location choices, in understanding agriculture's importance and how right to farm laws could impact them. True readers of the plan will be surprised to learn how much of their food is sourced locally and will want to learn more.
- Overall the plan will help farming and other land uses coexist peacefully.

The Plan should be updated every 10 years at a minimum, but it should also be subjected to regular review and maintenance. The review and maintenance process can accommodate changes in philosophy or changing philosophies without necessitating a commitment to a new planning process. To ensure the plan is implemented, **it is strongly recommended that an implementation committee or task force be formed with the responsibility of guiding the recommendations through to implementation.** The group should report to the Farmland Board on a regular basis and receive technical assistance and guidance as is needed from Cornell Cooperative Extension.

**AGRICULTURAL AND
FARMLAND PROTECTION
PLAN**

NIAGARA COUNTY

**Section I:
Agricultural Profile
and Assessment**



INVENTORY OF AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS, LAND, AND SOIL

High quality agricultural land is a necessary resource for agriculture. This section summarizes the quality of soils, the location of farms, and the types of farms in Niagara County.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS

Agricultural Districts in New York State are created to protect farmland and farming. Every eight years agricultural districts can be amended.

Circular 1150, Article 25-AA of the laws of New York State established both Agricultural Districts and Agricultural and Farmland Protection Boards. Several statements in Section 300 of the law, the Declaration of legislative findings, summarize the purpose of the law:

- It is hereby found and declared that many of the agricultural lands in New York State are in jeopardy of being lost for any agricultural purposes. When nonagricultural development extends into farm areas, competition for limited land resources results.
- The socio-economic vitality of agriculture in this state is essential to the economic stability and growth of many local communities and the state as a whole. It is, therefore, the declared policy of the state to conserve, protect and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural land for production of food and other agricultural products.
- It is the purpose of this article to provide a locally-initiated mechanism for the protection and enhancement of New York state's agricultural land as a viable segment of the local and state economies and as an economic and environmental resource of major importance



The NYS Agricultural Districts Law protects agriculture and farmland like this parcel in Niagara County through the County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board

The County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, in coordination with the County Legislature and County Planning Department, administer Agricultural Districts by:

- Reviewing, assessing and recommending the establishment, modification or continuance of lands included within Agricultural Districts;
- Advising the County Legislature on acquisition of any land within Agricultural Districts;
- Assessing and approving Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans;
- Reviewing any State agency laws or rulings impacting lands in Agricultural Districts and potentially requesting assistance from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets with the impacts of those laws on agricultural lands;
- Notifying the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets of any potential sitings of solid waste facilities on agricultural lands; and
- Reviewing and recommending changes to land classifications within Agricultural Districts.

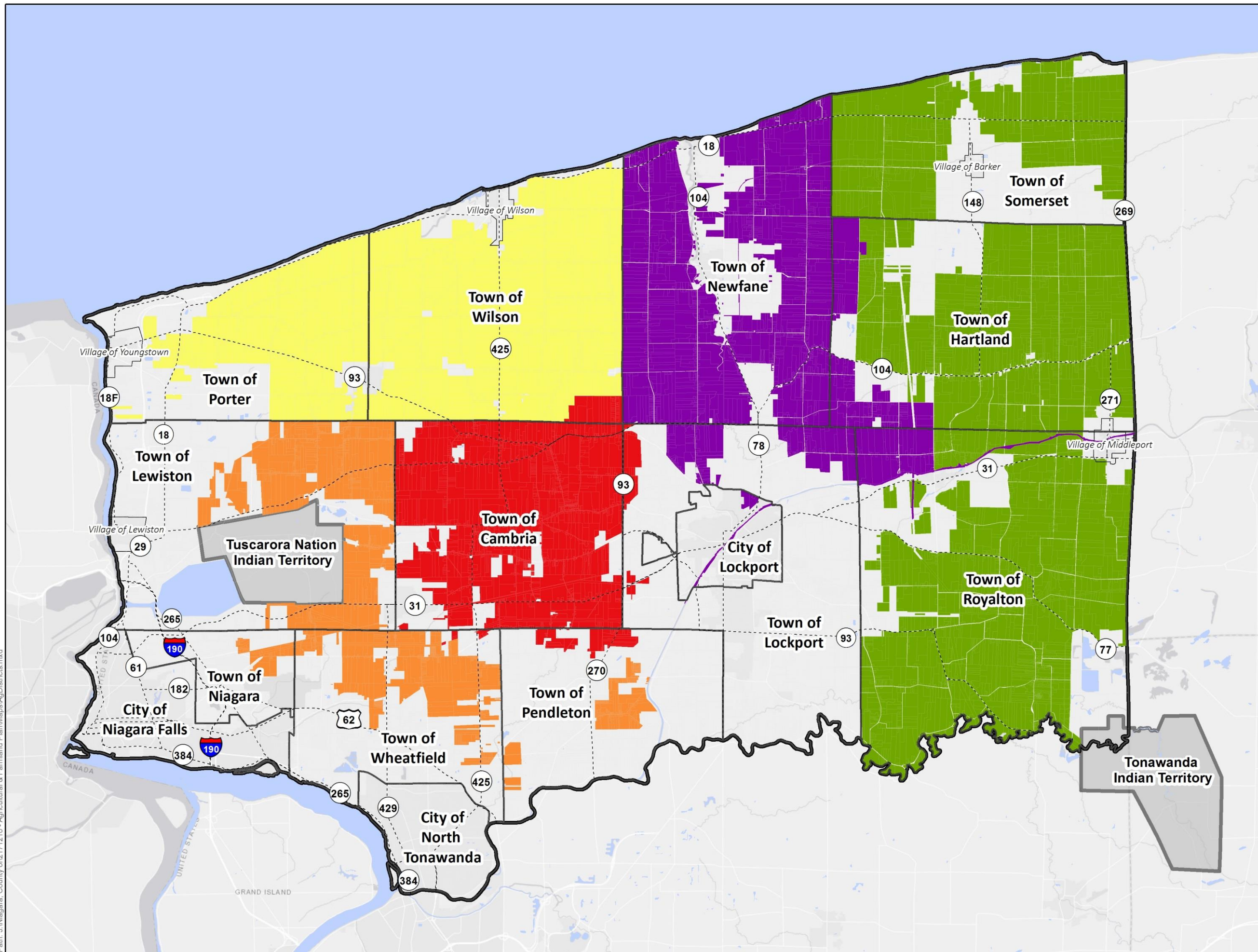
Niagara County has five agricultural districts (Figure 1):

- Ag District 2: Primarily in the Towns of Hartland and Royalton
- Ag District 4: Primarily in the Town of Newfane
- Ag District 6: Primarily in the Town of Cambria
- Ag District 7: Scattered on the outskirts of sprawling areas outside of the Town of Lewiston, Niagara, Wheatfield and Lockport.
- Ag District 8: Primarily in the Towns of Porter and Wilson

While Agricultural Districts don't directly protect agriculture and farmland, they strengthen the long term economic viability of farming through the following benefits (taken from Ag & Markets website):

- The agricultural assessment program allows eligible farmland located both within and outside agricultural districts to be taxed at its agricultural assessment, rather than at its fair market value.
- Agricultural District Law prohibits the enactment and administration of comprehensive plans, laws, ordinances, rules or regulations by local governments which would unreasonably restrict or regulate farm operations within an agricultural district, unless it can be shown that the public health or safety is threatened.
- Opinion and interpretations by Ag & Markets regarding whether agricultural uses are a nuisance.
- Requires that State agencies, local governments and public benefit corporations which intend to acquire more than one acre of land from any active farm within an agricultural district or more than 10 acres in total from a district, must file a notice of intent with the Commissioner and the county agricultural and farmland protection board.
- The ADL restricts assessments for local improvements to a lot not exceeding one-half acre surrounding any dwelling or non-farm structure located on land used in agricultural production in an agricultural district, and to farm structures directly benefited by the services.

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NIAGARA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PLAN

Figure 1. Agricultural Districts

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS MAP

Legend

Agricultural District No.

- 2
- 4
- 6
- 7
- 8

Major Roads

Water

Indian Territories

Municipal
Boundaries



0 1.5 3 Miles

1:168,000

Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. NYS Agricultural District: CUGIR database
3. Roads: TIGER/Line database
4. Parcel Boundary: Niagara County Office of Real Property
5. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community

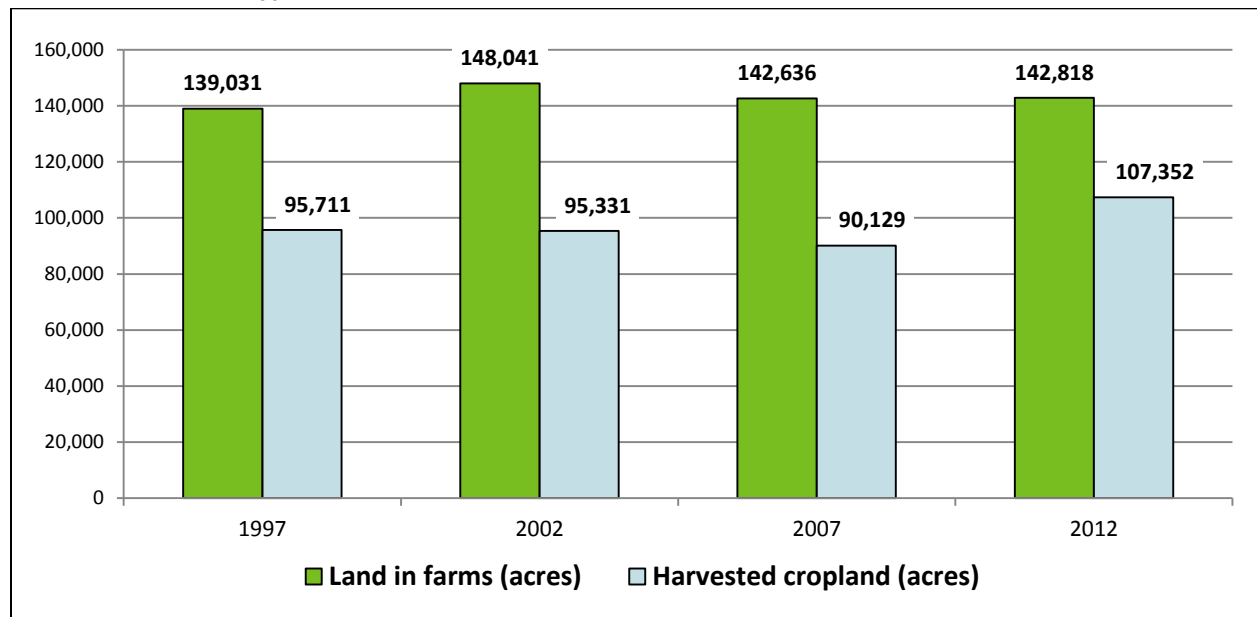
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LAND IN FARMS

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, approximately 142,818 acres of Niagara County were classified as "land in farms", 107,352 acres of which were "harvested cropland" (Chart 1). "Land in farms" consists primarily of agricultural land used for crops, pasture, or grazing and also includes woodland and wasteland not actually under cultivation or used for pasture or grazing, provided it was part of the farm operator's total operation. "Harvested cropland" includes land from which crops were harvested and hay was cut, land used to grow short-rotation woody crops, Christmas trees, and land in orchards, groves, vineyards, berries, nurseries, and greenhouses. The amount of "land in farms" and "harvested cropland" has essentially been stable between 1997 and 2012.¹

Chart 1. Land in Farms, 1997-2012



SOURCE: 2012 Census of Agriculture, Niagara County

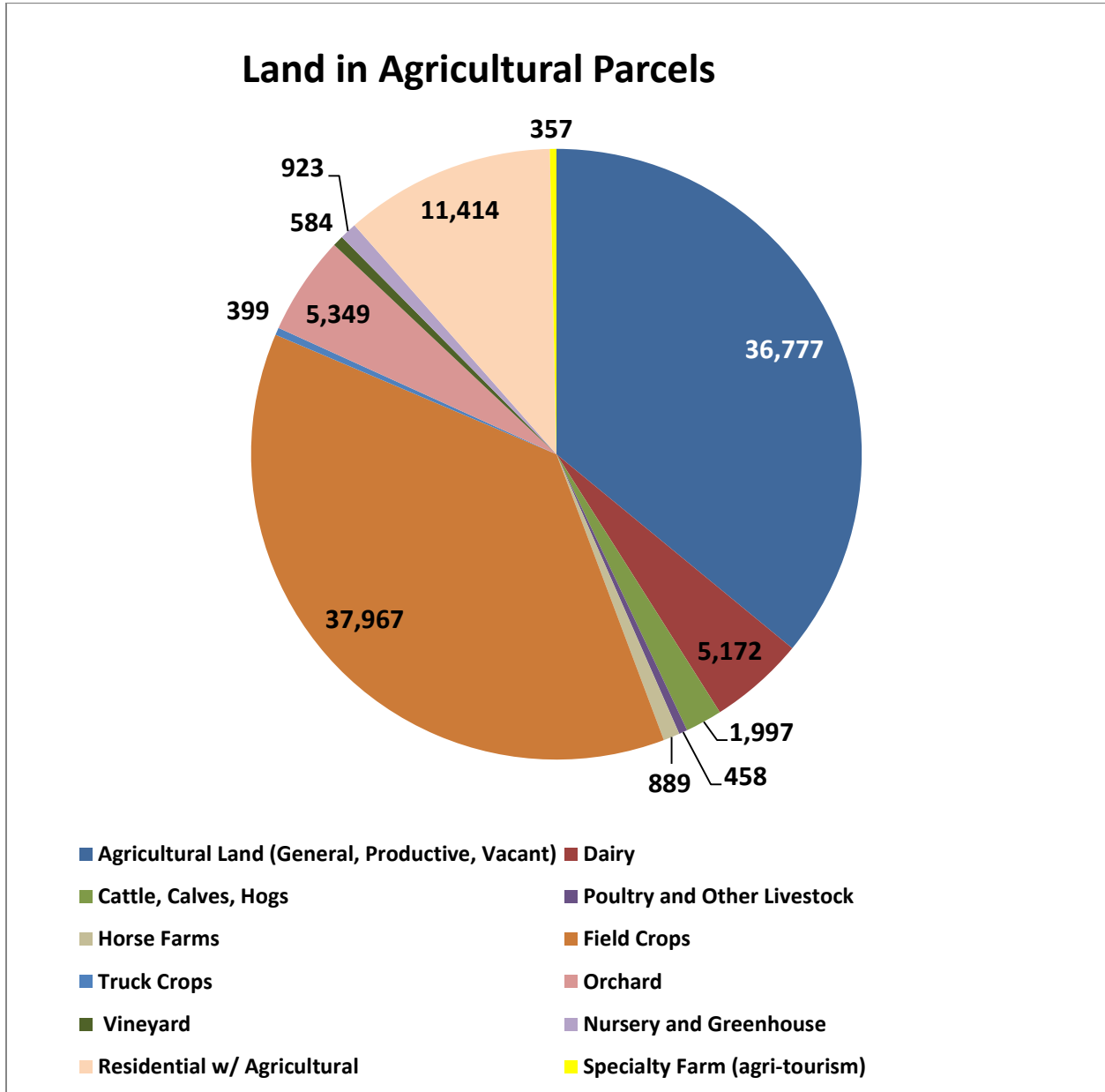
Most of the cropland in Niagara County is devoted to corn, grain, hay and other forage crops, and soybeans. Orchards comprised 4,017 acres and vegetables used 4,575 acres.

¹ SOURCE: 2012 Census of Agriculture

AGRICULTURAL PARCELS

A total of 1,787 parcels in Niagara County are classified for assessment purposes as agricultural. These parcels comprise 102,288 acres (Chart 2 and Figure 2).

Chart 2. Acres in Agricultural Parcels, by Parcel Classification



SOURCE: Niagara County Real Property Services

NIAGARA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND
PLAN

Figure 2. Agricultural Parcel

AGRICULTURAL
PARCELS MAP

Agricultural Parcel Use

- Agricultural Land (no buildings)
- Dairy
- Other Livestock
- Field/ Truck Crops
- Orchard/ Vineyard
- Nursery/ Greenhouse
- Residential with Ag
- Riding Stable
- Specialty Farm
- NewfaneRR
- Major Roads
- Water
- Indian Territories
- Municipal Boundaries



0 1.5 3 Miles

1:156,597

Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Roads: TIGER/Line database
3. Parcel Classification and Boundary: Niagara County Office of Real Property
4. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community



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A majority (64.4%) of the farmland in Niagara County is located in five Towns – Cambria, Hartland, Newfane, Royalton and Wilson (Table 1).

Table 1. Acres in Agricultural Parcels by Town

Municipality	# Parcels	Acres	% of Total Acres
Royalton (town excluding village of Middleport)	323	19,201	18.8%
Newfane (town)	265	14,279	14.0%
Wilson (town excluding village of Wilson)	175	11,154	10.9%
Hartland (town excluding village of Middleport)	144	10,666	10.4%
Cambria (town)	190	10,611	10.4%
Lockport (town)	146	7,669	7.5%
Somerset (town)	106	7,445	7.3%
Porter (town)	126	6,251	6.1%
Lewiston (town)	106	6,036	5.9%
Wheatfield (town)	116	5,049	4.9%
Pendleton (town)	68	3,579	3.5%
Lockport (city)	8	206	0.2%
Niagara (town)	5	74	0.1%
Wilson (village)	4	24	0.0%
Middleport (village)	3	39	0.0%
North Tonawanda (city)	2	5	0.0%
Total:	1,787	102,288	100.0%

SOURCE: Niagara County Real Property Services

AGRICULTURAL SOILS

High quality agricultural soils include those soil types designated by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) as "prime", "prime farmland if drained", and "farmland of statewide importance".² Countywide, high quality agricultural soils occupy a total of 283,256 acres in Niagara County (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Table 2. Agricultural Soil Suitability

Agricultural Soil Suitability	Acres	% of Total
Prime farmland	81,299	24.3%
Farmland of statewide importance	48,613	14.5%
Prime farmland if drained	153,344	45.8%
Other soils	51,451	15.4%
Total:	334,707	100.0%

SOURCE: USDA Soil Survey

Soils categorized as "prime farmland if drained" are highly productive once drainage improvements such as tiling are installed. Drainage improvements have been installed in most of the actively farmed land in Niagara County with these types of soils.³ Tiles are installed underground to guide stormwater runoff to drainage ditches and waterbodies.

One of the primary purposes of an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan is to preserve lands for agriculture that have prime soils. Similarly, the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) analysis will include an assessment of how other factors, like land development, impact prime soils.

² As defined by the U.S. Farmland Protection Policy Act, prime farmland is farmland that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses. Farmlands of statewide importance, identified by the NRCS State Conservationist, include those that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Soils that are prime if drained require artificial drainage to support yields comparable to prime soils.

³ SOURCE: Mike Clifford, Niagara County Soil & Water Conservation District, Phone conversation 11/15/17

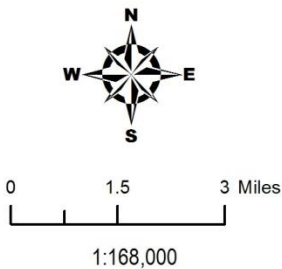
NIAGARA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND
PLAN

Figure 3. Soils

AGRICULTURAL
SOILS MAP

Legend

- Agricultural Soils**
- All areas are prime farmland
 - Farmland of statewide importance
 - Prime farmland if drained
 - Not prime farmland
- Major Roads**
- Water**
- Indian Territories**
- Municipal Boundaries**



Sources:
1. Soils, Water, and Municipal Boundaries including Indian Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Roads: TIGER/Line database
3. Parcel Boundary: Niagara County Office of Real Property
4. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community

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LAND USED FOR AGRICULTURE IN NIAGARA COUNTY

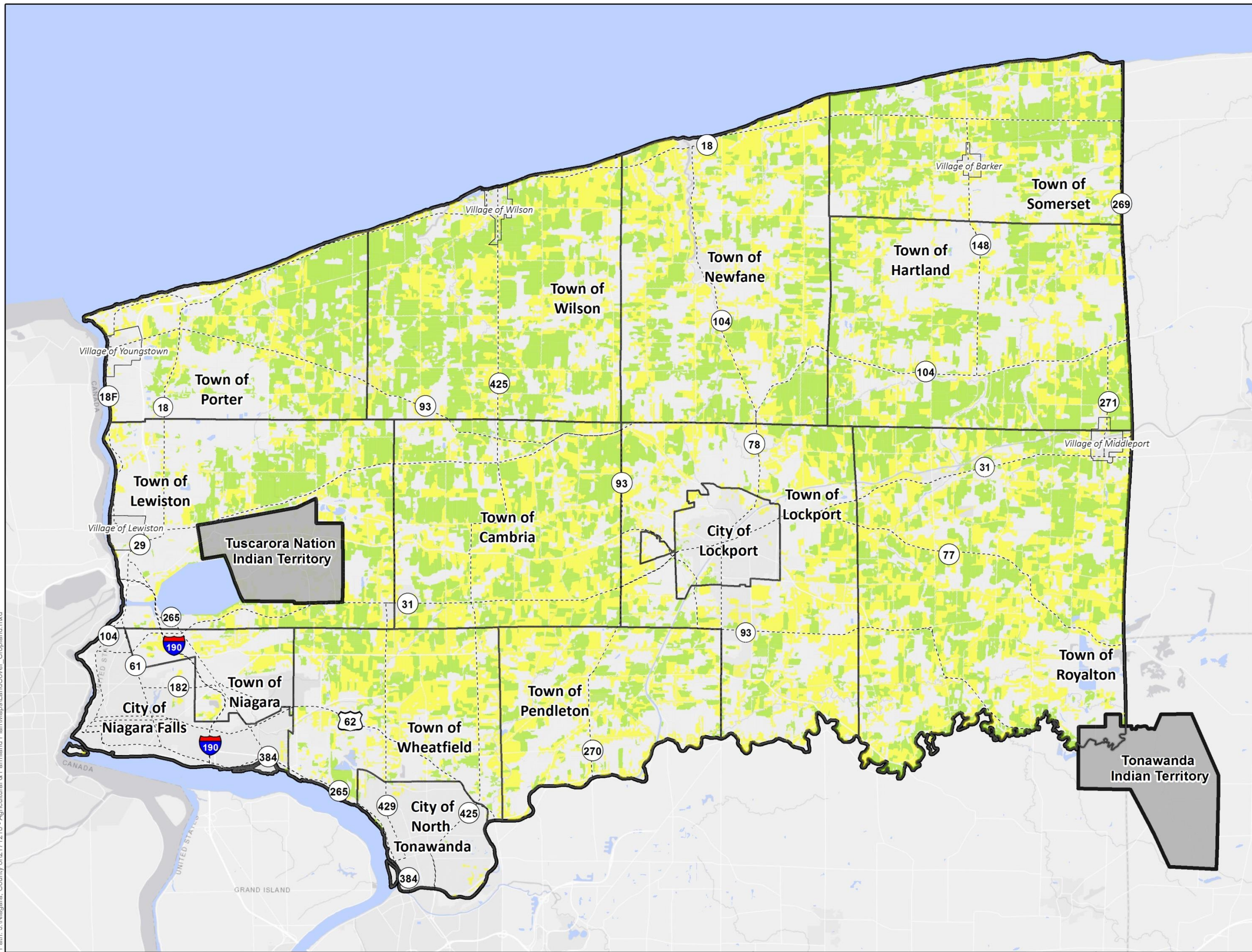
Niagara County is known primarily for its large municipal centers (Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda and the City of Lockport) and development corridors (Transit Road, Military Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard). Much of the land adjacent to the Niagara River is also largely non-agricultural land.

However, the large majority of the land in Niagara County is used for agriculture. Figures 4 and 5 on the following pages illustrate the extent of agricultural land cover as well as existing land use. There are 158,168 acres in agriculture based on real property land use classifications in the County.



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Figure 4. Land Cover

AGRICULTURAL LAND COVER MAP

Legend

Land Cover Types

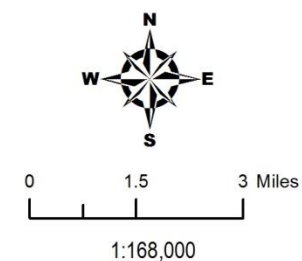
- Hay / Pasture
- Cultivated Crops

Major Roads

Water

Indian Territories

Municipal
Boundaries



Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Land Cover: National Land Cover Database 2011
3. Roads: TIGER/Line database
4. Parcel Boundary: Niagara County Office of Real Property
5. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community

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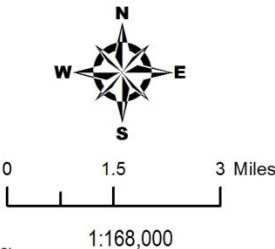
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PLAN

EXISTING
LAND USE MAP

Figure 5. Land Use
Legend

- Land Use Type**
- Agricultural
 - Residential
 - Vacant
 - Commercial
 - Storage/ Distribution
 - Recreation
 - Riding Stable
 - Parks/ Conservation
 - Public/ Community Service
 - Industrial/ Mining
 - Utilities/ Transportation
 - Major Roads
 - Water
 - Indian Territories
 - Municipal Boundaries



Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Roads: TIGER/Line database
3. Parcel Classification and Boundary: Niagara County Office of Real Property
4. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community



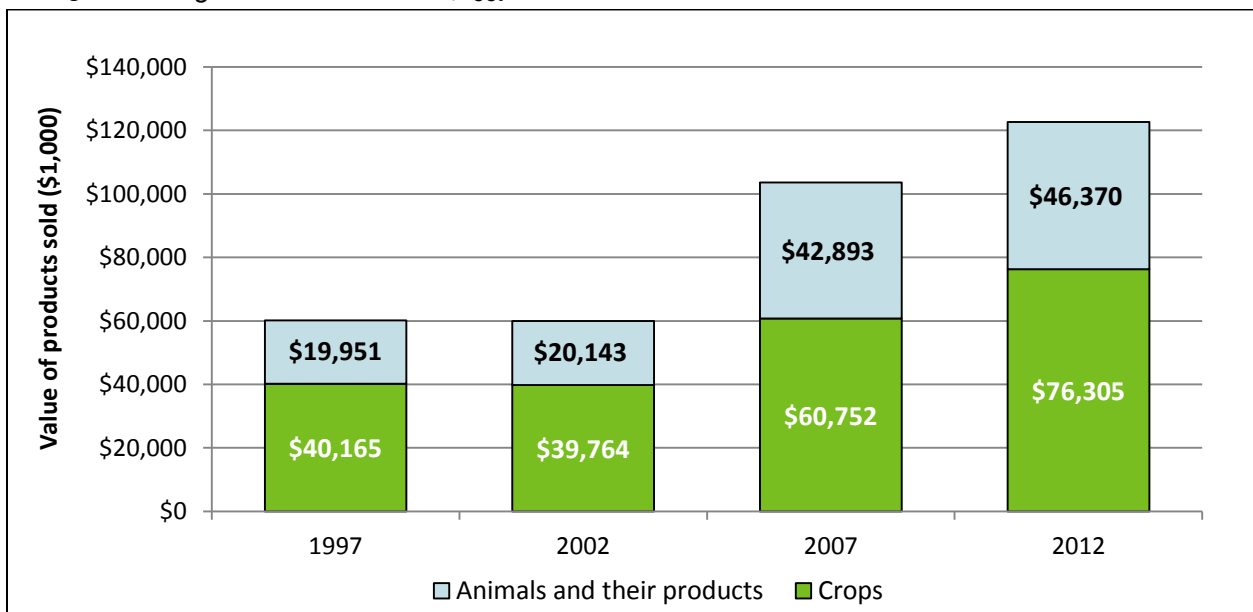
ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF AGRICULTURE

Farms and related businesses employ Niagara County residents, purchase goods and services from Niagara County businesses, create wealth for owners, and otherwise contribute to the regional economy of Niagara County and Western New York. Two sources of data help to measure and better understand agriculture's economic impact: the U.S. Census of Agriculture and the IMPLAN model. Data from the U.S. Census of Agriculture, conducted every five years, allows for comparisons over time and a "snapshot" of economic contributions during the year of the Census. Economic impact analysis using the IMPLAN model of inputs and outputs allows for a more detailed analysis of the economic impact of various types of agriculture and related businesses on the local economy.

U.S. CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, farms in Niagara County produced agricultural products valued at \$122,675,000; this represents an increase of 18.4% between 2007 and 2012 (Chart 3). Even if inflation is taken into account, the value of agricultural products increased almost six percent.

Chart 3. Value of Agricultural Products Sold, 1997-2012



SOURCE: 2012 Census of Agriculture, Niagara County

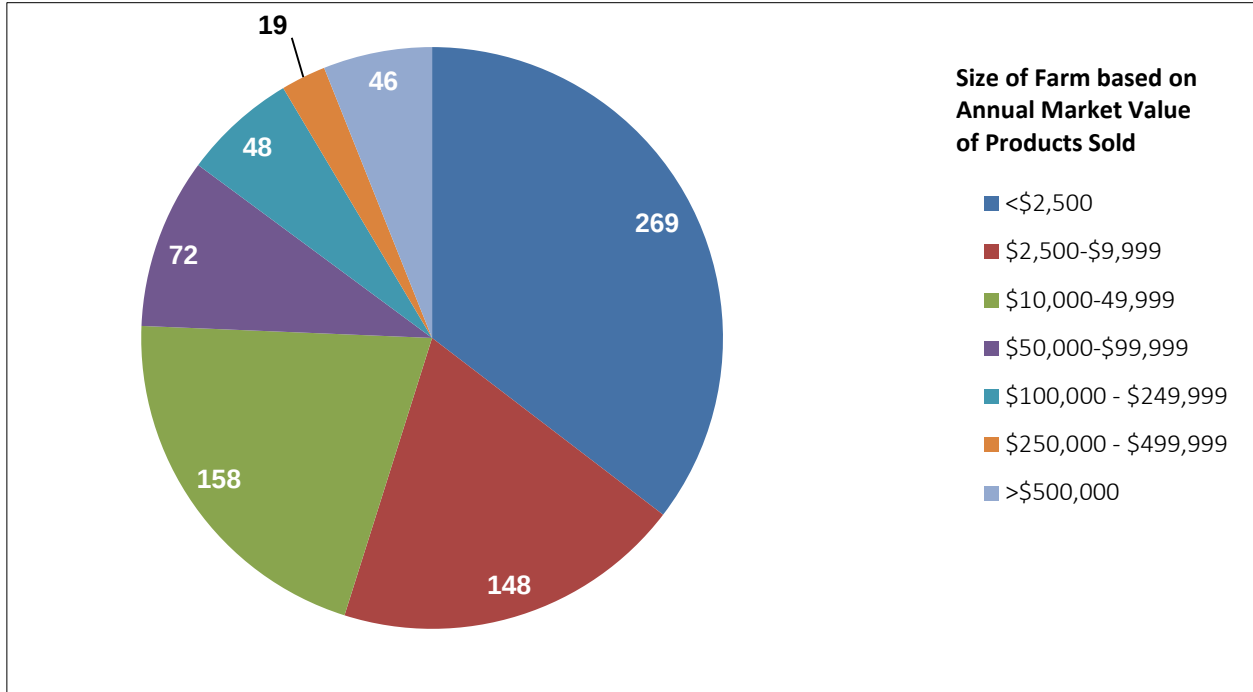
FARM SIZE

A few large commercial farms are responsible for most of the production. In 2012, approximately 46 farms with annual sales of more than \$500,000 generated nearly 80% of the total value of agricultural products sold. The 67 farms with sales between \$100,000 and \$499,999 produced products valued at approximately \$7.1 million.

A total of 269 small farms in Niagara County had less than \$2,500 in annual sales and another 306 farms had sales between \$2,500 and \$49,999. Farms with annual sales of less than \$50,000 sold products valued at approximately \$6.8 million in 2012.

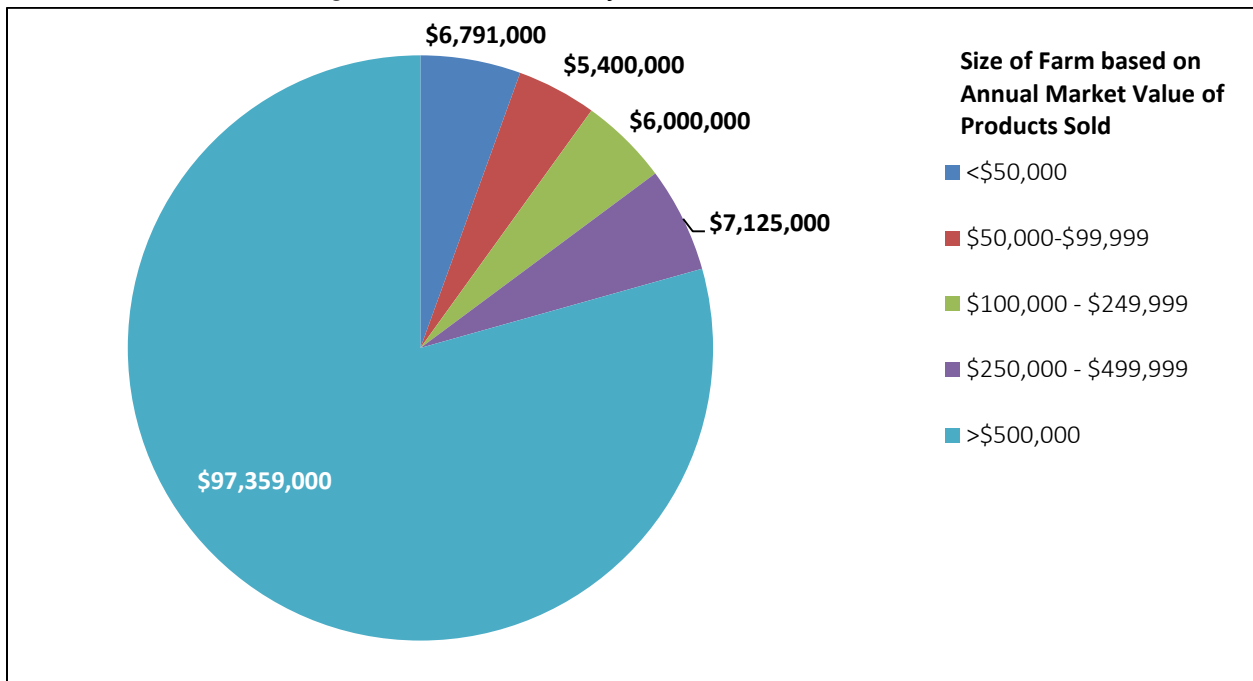
While small and part-time farms help to keep land in agricultural production, provide food for local consumption and support local agricultural service businesses, fewer than one-half (47%) of the 760 farm operators identified in the 2012 Census of Agriculture derived their principal income from farming.





SOURCE: 2012 Census of Agriculture, Niagara County

Chart 4. Total Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold by Size of Farm, 2012

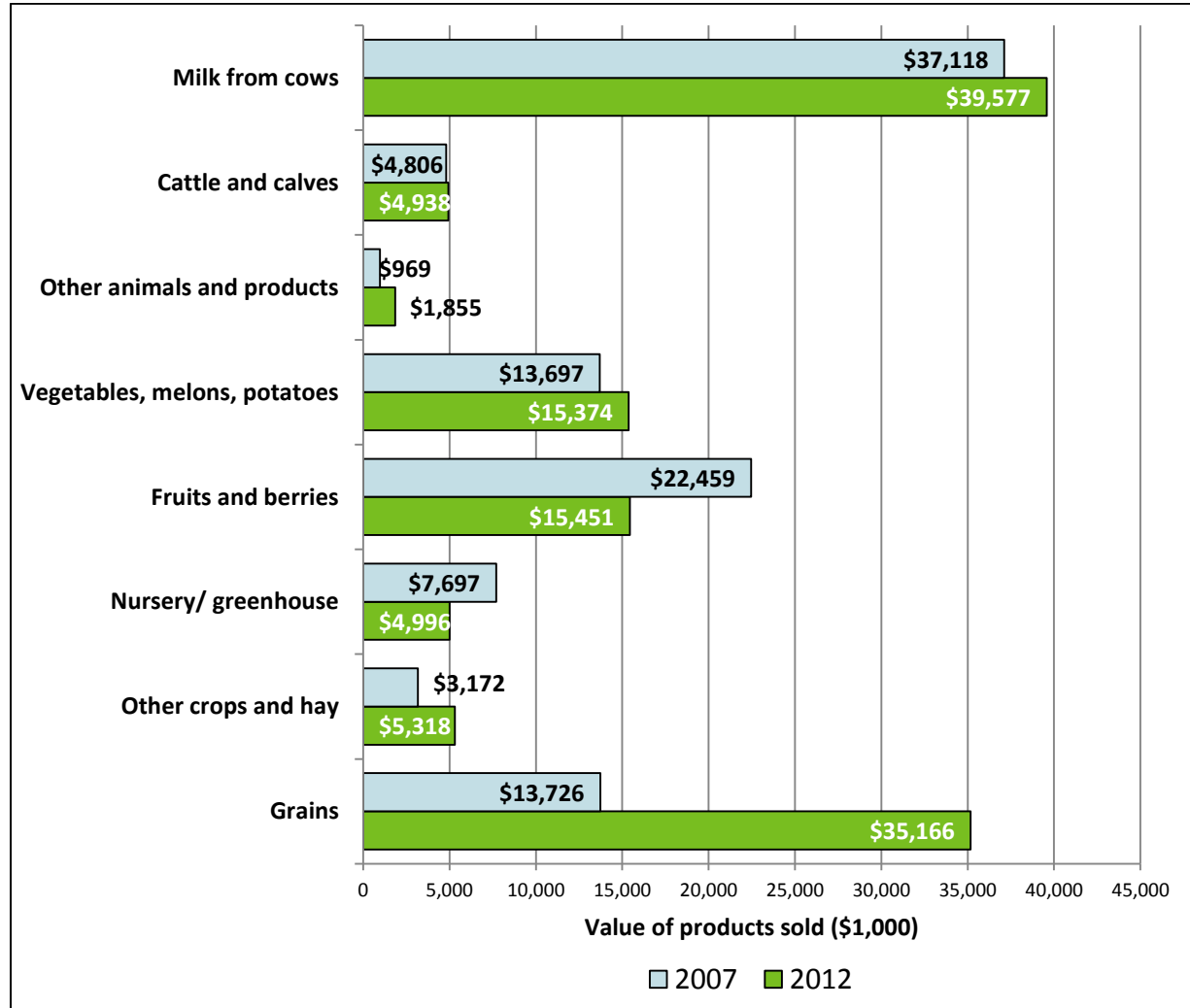


SOURCE: LaBella Associates based on 2012 Census of Agriculture, Niagara County

TYPE OF FARM

Dairy, grains, fruits and vegetables were the products with the highest value in sales (Chart 6). Niagara County farms also sold nursery and horticultural crops, hay, cattle and other livestock.

Chart 5. Value of Agricultural Sales by Commodity, 2007 & 2012



SOURCE: 2012 Census of Agriculture, Niagara County

Niagara County's 24 dairy farms and 9,770 milk cows generated \$39,577 million in sales. The value of milk sold in 2012 was 7% higher than in 2007, and more than 150% higher than in 2002.

Sales of grains generated \$35.166 million in 2012, an increase of 156% over 2007. Corn contributed \$23.349 million and soybeans \$8.086 million. Other grain crops produced in Niagara County are wheat, oats, and barley.

Niagara County is the 7th largest producer of fruits and berries in New York State. Fruit produced at Niagara County's 90 orchards sold for \$15.093 million in 2012. This represents a decrease of 31% between 2012 and 2007. Of the 5,017 acres of land in orchards, 53% were devoted to apples, 18% to grapes, 14% to cherries, 9% to peaches, and the remainder to pears, plums, apricots and others.

Berries grown on 106 acres included strawberries (45%), raspberries (29%) and blueberries (20%). The total value of berries produced in Niagara County was \$358,000.

The value of vegetables, melons and potatoes sold in 2012 was \$15.374 million, an increase of 12% from 2007. Of the 4,575 acres of vegetables harvested, 22% were devoted to sweet corn, 9% to pumpkins, and 5% to tomatoes. Other vegetables included peppers, cucumbers, squash, melons, and potatoes.

Nursery, greenhouse, and horticulture crops produced at 54 farms generated \$4.996 million in 2012, down 35% from 2007. These facilities include 303,000 sq. ft. used to raise bedding and garden plants and 306,000 sq. ft. under glass for greenhouse vegetables and tomatoes, nursery stock, flowers and berries. Sales of Christmas trees generated \$31,000, down from \$162,000 in 2007.

Sales of 7,912 cattle and calves generated \$4.938 million, an increase of 3% from 2007. Sales of poultry and eggs generated \$919,000, up 77% from 2007. Sales of other animals and their products, including hogs and pigs, sheep, goats and others, generated \$1.855 million, an increase of 91% from 2007.

FARM EXPENDITURES

The 2012 Census of Agriculture estimated total farm production expenses at \$99.051 million. The net cash farm income for all Niagara County farms was \$33.332 million.

AGRITOURISM

In 2012, 25 farms with income from agritourism or recreation generated revenue totaling \$1.658 million. This represents an increase from 15 farms in 2007 and an increase of 227% in revenue.

INTERNET

In 2007, 21% of the 524 farms with internet access had dial-up service. By 2012, 546 farms had internet service, of which 37 (6.8%) still relied on dial-up service.

IMPLAN MODEL (INPUT-OUTPUT ANALYSIS)

"Input-Output" analysis of a regional economy models the transactions among businesses, households and institutions. To analyze the agricultural economy of Niagara County, IMPLAN software and data package was used to compute the following economic impact metrics:

- the direct economic impact of agriculture and related industries (value of products sold, number of employees, and income to employees and owners)
- "value added" - difference between value of products sold ("output") and the cost of goods and services purchased from other businesses to create the product ("inputs")
- the "multiplier effect" (jobs and value created when farms purchase goods and supplies from other businesses plus spending by employees and owners of these businesses)
- portion of goods and services that Niagara County farms purchased from businesses within Niagara County

The following analysis of the impact of agriculture and related businesses on the local economy helps to identify opportunities for new or expanded businesses that interact with farms. Although Niagara County is part of the larger economy of Western New York, and especially Buffalo and Erie County, this analysis focuses on businesses and transactions within Niagara County.

VALUE OF PRODUCTS SOLD

According to the IMPLAN model, the total value of agricultural products sold ("output") in Niagara County in 2015 was \$140.3 million. Of this amount, 40.6% was created by dairy farms, which produced milk valued at \$56.9 million. Fruit farms created \$22.8 million in output. Agricultural production represents approximately 1% of the total output of industries and institutions in Niagara County (for comparison, Manufacturing contributes 36%, Service businesses 32%, and Government 14% of the overall economic output).

JOBS AND LABOR INCOME

Several indicators help to measure the impact of agriculture on the local economy. These include the number of employees, amount paid to these employees, and the income returned to owners and investors. Fruit farming had the largest number of employees (including part-time and seasonal) with 476, followed by "all other crop farming" with 293 and dairy with 217.

Fruit farming also paid the most in total compensation to employees, with \$8.7 million, and income to proprietors (owners and investors) with \$12.1 million. Dairy paid \$5.2 million to employees and \$11.6 to proprietors. The industry with the highest average compensation per employee was poultry and egg production, followed by greenhouse, nursery and floriculture.

VALUE ADDED

The difference between the value of goods produced ("output") and the cost of goods and services purchased to create the goods or services ("inputs") is the "value added". This metric is a good measure to compare impacts of various industries.

In Niagara County in 2015, the agricultural sector with the highest "value added" was Dairy (\$22.1 million), followed closely by Fruit farming (\$19.1 million).

INPUTS PURCHASED LOCALLY

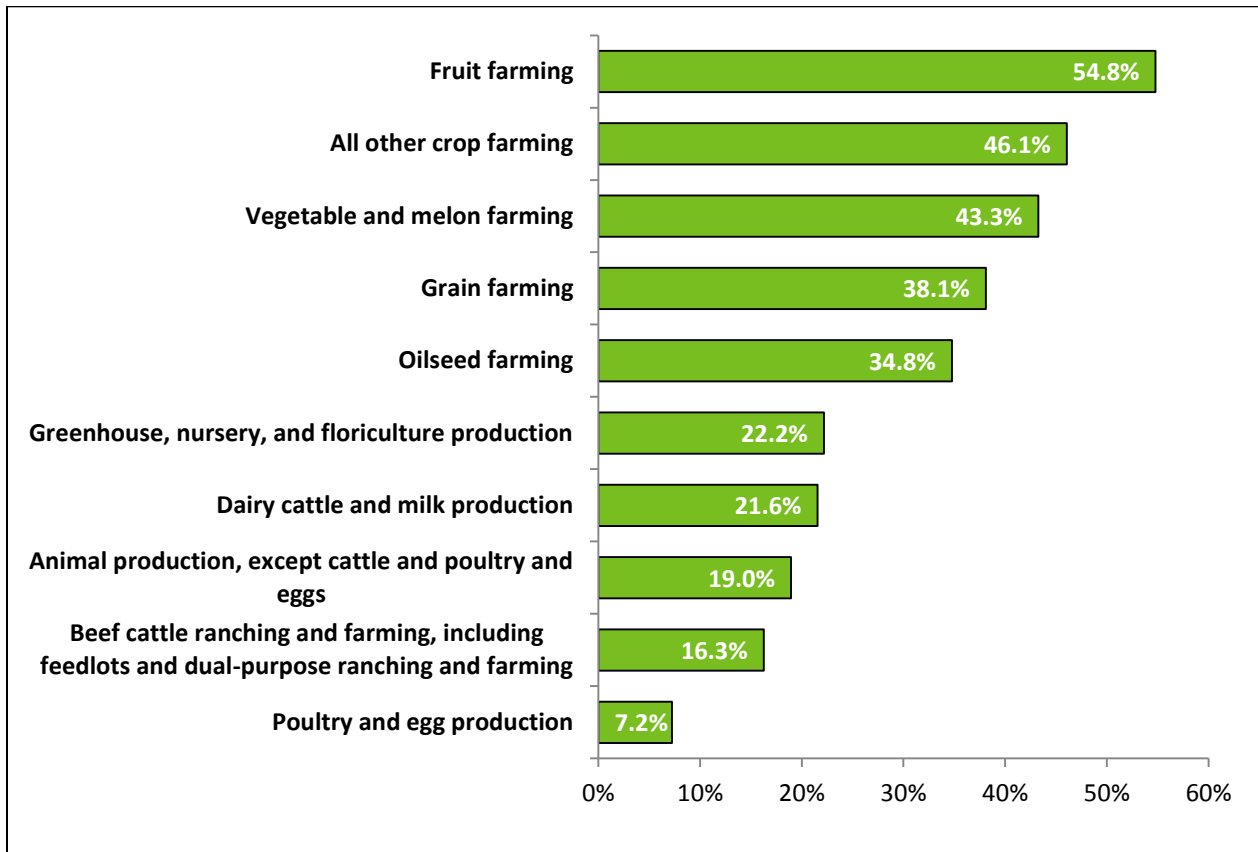
One way to grow the local economy is to encourage businesses to purchase more of their inputs from local businesses, rather than "importing" goods or services from businesses in other regions. IMPLAN models how much each industrial sector spends for various types of inputs and the proportion purchased from businesses within Niagara County. The model can help identify those goods and services purchased from outside businesses that could be provided by businesses within the County.

For example, the dairy industry purchased \$34.8 million in goods and services, of which \$7.8 million (21.6%) were from businesses in Niagara County (Chart 7). Dairy farms expended \$3.8 million for agricultural support services, \$1.2 million for wholesale distribution services, and \$834,000 to purchase crops. Dairy farms also purchase a lot of agricultural products from businesses located outside Niagara County, including grains valued at \$1.2 million, beef cattle valued at \$1.2 million and other animal food valued at \$10.8 million.

Grain farms purchased \$3.1 million from local businesses (38% of their total inputs), Oilseed farms purchased \$1.2 million, and Vegetable farms purchased \$1.35 million in inputs (goods and services) from other businesses in Niagara County; most were from businesses that provide agricultural support services. Fruit farming is the agricultural sector that is most integrated with the local economy. These farms purchased goods and services valued at \$2.1 million (55% of its total inputs) from businesses within Niagara County.

In contrast, the proportion of inputs purchased locally was 22% for greenhouse operations, 16% for beef cattle farming, 19% for other animals and 7% for poultry and egg production. These operations require fewer specialized services that agricultural support businesses in Niagara County provide.

Chart 6. Inputs Purchased Within Niagara County by Type of Farm

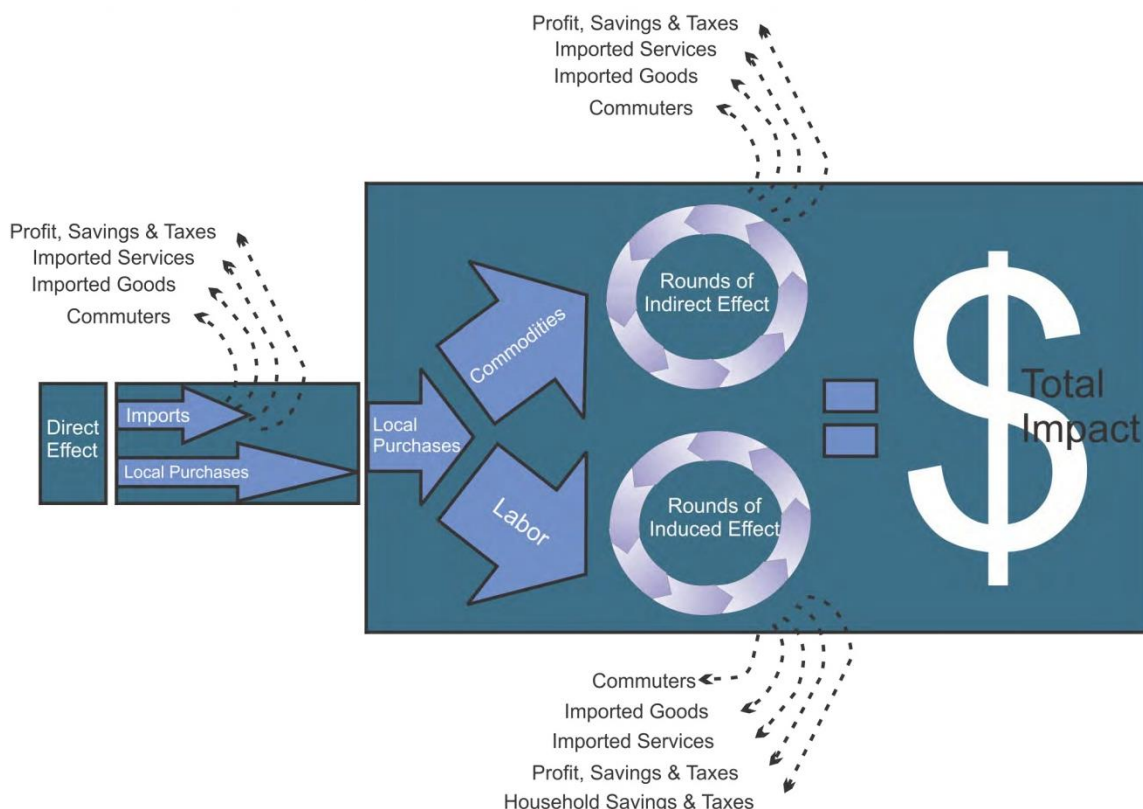


SOURCE: IMPLAN model, 2015 data

MULTIPLIERS

Another way to measure the impact of agriculture on the economy is to look at the “multiplier” of various sectors. The number of jobs and the value of goods or services produced in each sector comprise the “Direct” economic impact. Businesses generate “Indirect” economic benefits by purchasing goods or services from other businesses. As employees and owners spend the money they earned, they add “Induced” economic impacts to the local economy. The “Multiplier” is the sum of “Direct”, “Indirect”, and “Induced” benefits.

Figure 6. Economic Input-Output Analysis



SOURCE: Frances Day, [Principles of Impact Analysis & IMPLAN Applications](#)

The "Multiplier" is calculated by adding the following three figures:

- The value of agricultural commodity produced (direct effect)
- Expenditures at other businesses in Niagara County (indirect effects)
- Spending by employees and owners at businesses in Niagara County (induced effects)

For example, a "Total Multiplier" of 1.56 would indicate that for every \$1 in value of agricultural product/service produced ("Direct" impact) an additional 56¢ will be spent at other businesses within Niagara County ("Indirect" and "Induced").

The multipliers for fruit and vegetable farming (1.56 and 1.51 respectively) are among the highest of all industries – not just farms – in Niagara County (Table 3). Oilseed, grain, nursery and other crop farming also have multipliers above the median of 1.29.⁴ Dairy farming's multiplier is 1.31. Of the reported agricultural industries, only beef cattle ranching/farming and poultry/egg production are below the median at 1.26 and 1.20 respectively.

⁴ The median multiplier for all industries (not just farms) located within Niagara County is 1.29.

Economic Indicators by Industry Niagara County, NY—2015

Industry Code	Description	Employment	Output (Commodity Production) (\$1000)	Average Compensation per Employee	Value Added (\$1000)	Gross Inputs (\$1000)	Regional Inputs (\$1000)	Regional Purchase % (RPC)	Total (SAM Type) Multiplier
1	Oilseed farming	15	5,346	2,910	1,991	3,355	1,167	34.8%	1.44
2	Grain farming	92	16,895	5,186	3,391	13,504	5,146	38.1%	1.43
3	Vegetable and melon farming	115	15,217	32,214	12,097	3,120	1,350	43.3%	1.51
4	Fruit farming	476	22,853	18,217	19,061	3,793	2,078	54.8%	1.56
5	Tree nut farming	1	119	38,100	101	19	11	58.7%	1.53
6	Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production	47	5,323	43,118	4,012	1,311	291	22.2%	1.49
10	All other crop farming	293	9,586	13,352	5,857	3,729	1,717	46.1%	1.51
11	Beef cattle ranching and farming	65	5,105	2,948	1,305	3,800	618	16.3%	1.26
12	Dairy cattle and milk production	217	56,920	24,239	22,101	34,819	7,505	21.6%	1.31
13	Poultry and egg production	4	1,949	46,832	478	1,471	106	7.2%	1.20
14	Animal production, except cattle, poultry, eggs	13	964	7,646	587	377	71	19.0%	1.44
Total:		1,336	140,277	18,410	70,981	69,297	18		
AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES									
19	Support activities for agriculture and forestry	1,018	23,764	5,645	10,409	13,355	1,484	11.1%	1.44
FOOD MANUFACTURING									
78	Confectionery manuf. from purchased chocolate	16	4,665	27,675	768	3,897	420	10.8%	1.18
80	Frozen specialties manufacturing	10	3,368	25,549	441	2,927	219	7.5%	1.14
81	Canned fruits and vegetables manufacturing	48	22,871	37,742	2,764	20,107	2,035	10.1%	1.16
84	Fluid milk manufacturing	19	15,196	40,095	1,332	13,864	912	6.6%	1.11
94	Bread and bakery product, exc.frozen, manufact.	238	29,647	26,500	11,987	17,660	2,441	13.8%	1.22
95	Frozen cakes and other pastries manufacturing	9	1,384	23,799	469	915	103	11.2%	1.17
103	Mayonnaise, dressing, and sauce manufacturing	18	11,075	49,484	1,985	9,090	624	6.9%	1.13
106	Bottled and canned soft drinks & water	3	2,449	29,986	452	1,998	195	9.8%	1.16
108	Breweries	34	38,243	39,526	17,275	20,968	2,403	11.5%	1.11
109	Wineries	77	33,039	19,427	16,046	16,993	2,052	12.1%	1.29
Total:		471	161,937	319,783	53,520	108,418	11,404		

"Output" = Value of products sold

"Employment" includes full-time, part-time and seasonal

"Value Added" = Output minus cost to produce (inputs, wages, taxes, owner/ proprietor income)

"Inputs" = the value of goods and services purchased from other industries, plus wages, proprietor income, rent and taxes. "Gross" = total payments; "Regional" = payments to industries/ institutions/ households in Niagara County

"SAM Type Multiplier" = Factor indicating how much additional value is created when industries purchase goods and supplies from other businesses, including household spending by employees and owners of these businesses

SOURCE: IMPLAN model, 2015 data

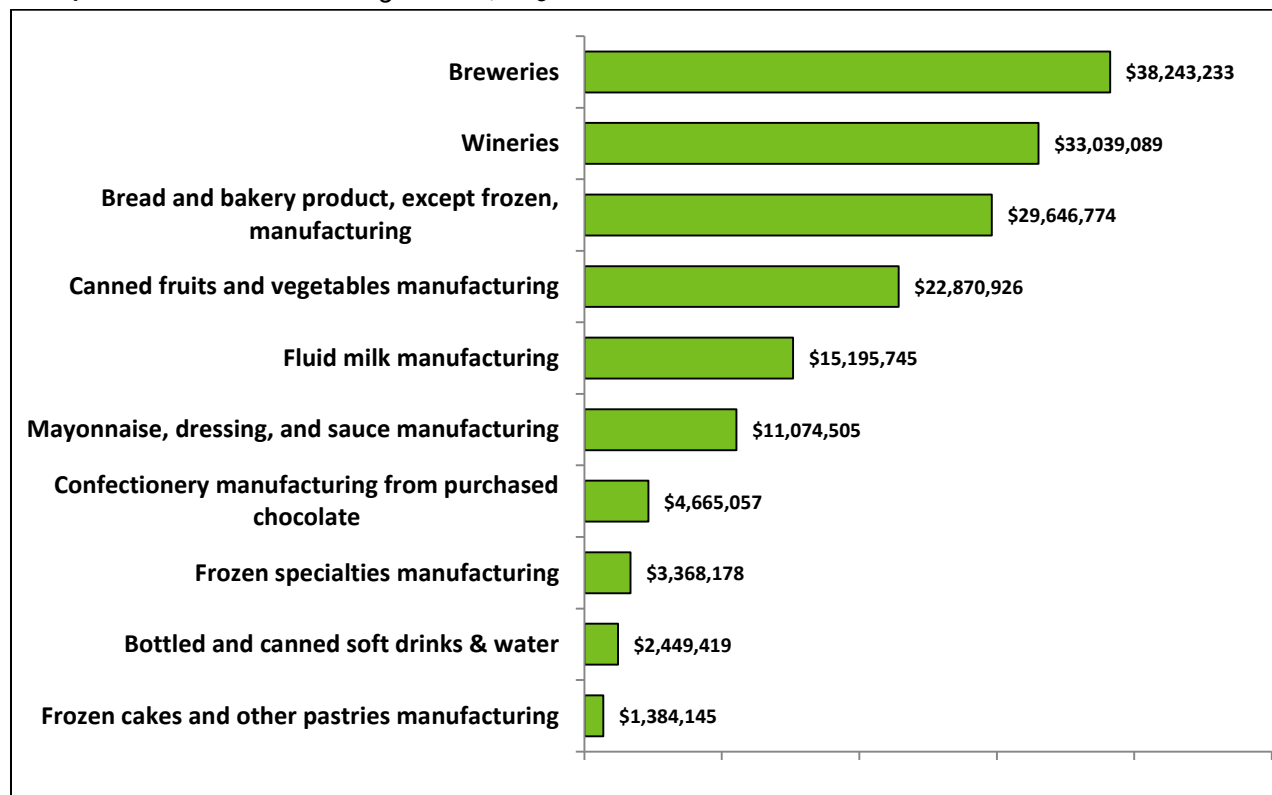
AGRICULTURE-RELATED SERVICE BUSINESSES

Businesses that provide services to farms are highly integrated with the local agricultural economy, as most farms use local businesses for these services. Agricultural support businesses employed 1,018 people in 2015. The value of sales was \$23.8 million.

WINERIES, BREWERIES AND OTHER FOOD MANUFACTURERS

Food manufacturing in Niagara County employed 471 people in 2015 and generated \$161.9 million in sales (Chart 8). Wineries and breweries represent 44% of all food manufacturing sales in Niagara County.

Chart 7. Value of Food Manufacturing Products, 2015



SOURCE: IMPLAN model, 2015 data

Interestingly, a small proportion of the goods and services purchased by wineries and breweries (inputs) are supplied by Niagara County businesses. Breweries expended \$21 million for goods, services, labor and other inputs in 2015, of which \$2.4 million (11.5%) was expended in Niagara County. These local expenditures included \$174,403 for "all other crops" (e.g., hops) and \$183,160 for "truck transportation services". Similarly, wineries purchased 12.1% of their \$2 million in inputs locally.

Less than 1% of the fruit purchased by wineries came from Niagara County farms. This is partly because the wineries need to supplement their supply in the winter months. There is also not enough variety of grapes grown in the County which could be addressed by encouraging or incentivizing farmers to increase varieties.

LAND EVALUATION AND SITE ASSESSMENT (LESA)

The Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system assigns numerical ratings to individual parcels to determine suitability for agricultural production and farmland protection.

The "Land Evaluation" component is based on the quality of the soils for agricultural use. The "Site Assessment" component includes factors such as development pressure, proximity to other protected land or natural resource benefits. The LESA user decides which factors to use and the various weights assigned to each.

One intent of this parcel rating system for Niagara County is to identify farms that may be good candidates for long-term protection, including through Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) by the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets. To assist Niagara County in identifying farms suitable for PDR, the LESA rating factors align with the following funding criteria used by NYS to choose farms for PDR grants:

1. Quality of agricultural soils
2. Buffer to natural resources
3. Extent of development pressure

In addition, as noted throughout this document, "protection" of farmland with high LESA ratings may also be provided by local municipalities in many ways including:

- Updating local zoning ordinances and land use regulations to promote farming and minimize uses that promote sprawl into prime farmland; and
- Supporting agritourism, farming, and young farmers as an economic driver.

The LESA parcel rating assigns scores to agricultural parcels based on agricultural value, proximity to natural resources, and development pressure. The combined rating combines these three components.

- The Agricultural rating is based on agricultural soil suitability. Parcels with the highest Agricultural Rating are large, consist mostly of high quality agricultural soils, and are within a NYS Agricultural District.
- The Natural Resources rating is based on proximity to NYS regulated wetlands, streams, and Lake Ontario.
- The Development Pressure rating assigns the highest scores to agricultural parcels that are located in developed or developing areas. These are vulnerable to development.

AGRICULTURAL RATING

For each agricultural parcel, GIS software was used to calculate the number of acres of cropland or pasture within each parcel with soils that are classified as Prime, Prime if Drained, and Soils of Statewide Significance based on the USDA Soil Survey. The number of acres in each category was multiplied by the following weighting factors:

- Prime Soils: 10
- Prime when Drained: 7
- Soils of Statewide Importance: 4

The sum of the three scores is the Agricultural Soils rating. Parcels with the highest Agricultural Soils rating have the greatest amount of high quality agricultural soils.

As farm parcels must be located within a NYS-certified Agricultural District to be eligible to receive grant funding for PDR, the rating system also considers whether or not parcels are within an Agricultural District. This factor also serves as a proxy for agricultural viability. Parcels within an Agricultural District receive 500 points.

The Agricultural Rating score is the sum of the Agricultural Soils score and the Agricultural District score. Parcels with a high Agricultural Rating score have good soil characteristics, are located in agricultural districts, and as such, have some of the characteristics which suggest they should be protected (Figure 7).

Table 3. Agricultural Rating Factor

Agricultural Rating Factor	Basis	Weighting Factor
Prime Soils	# acres	X 10
Prime when Drained	# acres	X 7
Soils of Statewide Importance	# acres	X 4
Within Agricultural District	Y/N	500 / 0

NATURAL RESOURCES RATING

The Natural Resources rating was based on the number of acres within each agricultural parcel that contained:

- Land within 150 feet of a mapped stream
- A regulated wetland, including a 100-foot buffer from wetlands regulated by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- Land within 1,000 feet of the Lake Ontario shoreline

The acreage in each of these categories was added together to return the Natural Resource Value Rating. Parcels with the highest rating contained the most acreage of sensitive natural resources and/or proximity to Lake Ontario. By acting like a buffer between the sensitive natural resources and sprawling development, parcels with a high Natural Resources Rating score have some of the characteristics which suggest they should be protected (Figure 8).

Table 4. Natural Resources Rating Factor

Natural Resources Rating Factor	Basis	Weighting Factor
Within 150 feet of Mapped Stream	Y/N	500 / 0
Within 100 feet of Wetland	Y/N	500 / 0
Within 150 feet of Lake Ontario	Y/N	1,000 / 0

DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE RATING

The Development Pressure rating is derived from the agricultural parcel's location within one or more of the Regional Growth Policy Areas delineated in the 2006 *Erie/Niagara Regional Framework for Regional Growth*. The map delineates Developed Areas, Developing Areas, and Rural Areas as well as overlays for Development Centers and Development Corridors. Agricultural parcels located in Developed Areas/Developing Areas received 500 points, agricultural parcels located in Development Centers received 500 points, and agricultural parcels located in Development Corridors received 500 points. The Development Pressure Rating score was a sum of these three factors. Agricultural parcels located in these four development areas are considered to have greater development pressure than those in Rural Areas and therefore are in greater need of protection (Figure 9).

Table 5. Development Pressure Rating Factor

Development Pressure Rating Factor	Basis	Weighting Factor
Within Developed or Developing Area	Y/N	500 / 0
Within Development Center	Y/N	500 / 0
Within Development Corridor	Y/N	500 / 0

COMBINED RATING

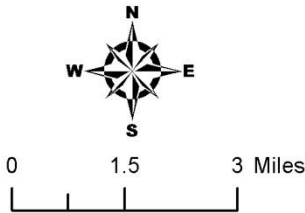
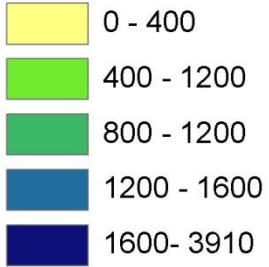
The Combined rating is the sum of the Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Development Pressure scores (Figure 10). Agricultural parcels with a high combined rating are potentially good candidates for long-term protection because they:

- likely have good soil characteristics,
- are likely located within an agricultural district,
- are likely located within/near natural resources (providing a buffer between the natural resource and developed areas), and
- are likely experiencing development pressures due to their location within the various developing areas.

**LESA Rating -
Agricultural
Factors**

Figure 7. LESA Ratings –
Agricultural Factors

**Ag Soils + Ag
District Rating**



Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Roads: TIGER/Line database
3. Parcel Classification and Boundary: Niagara County Office of Real Property
4. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the

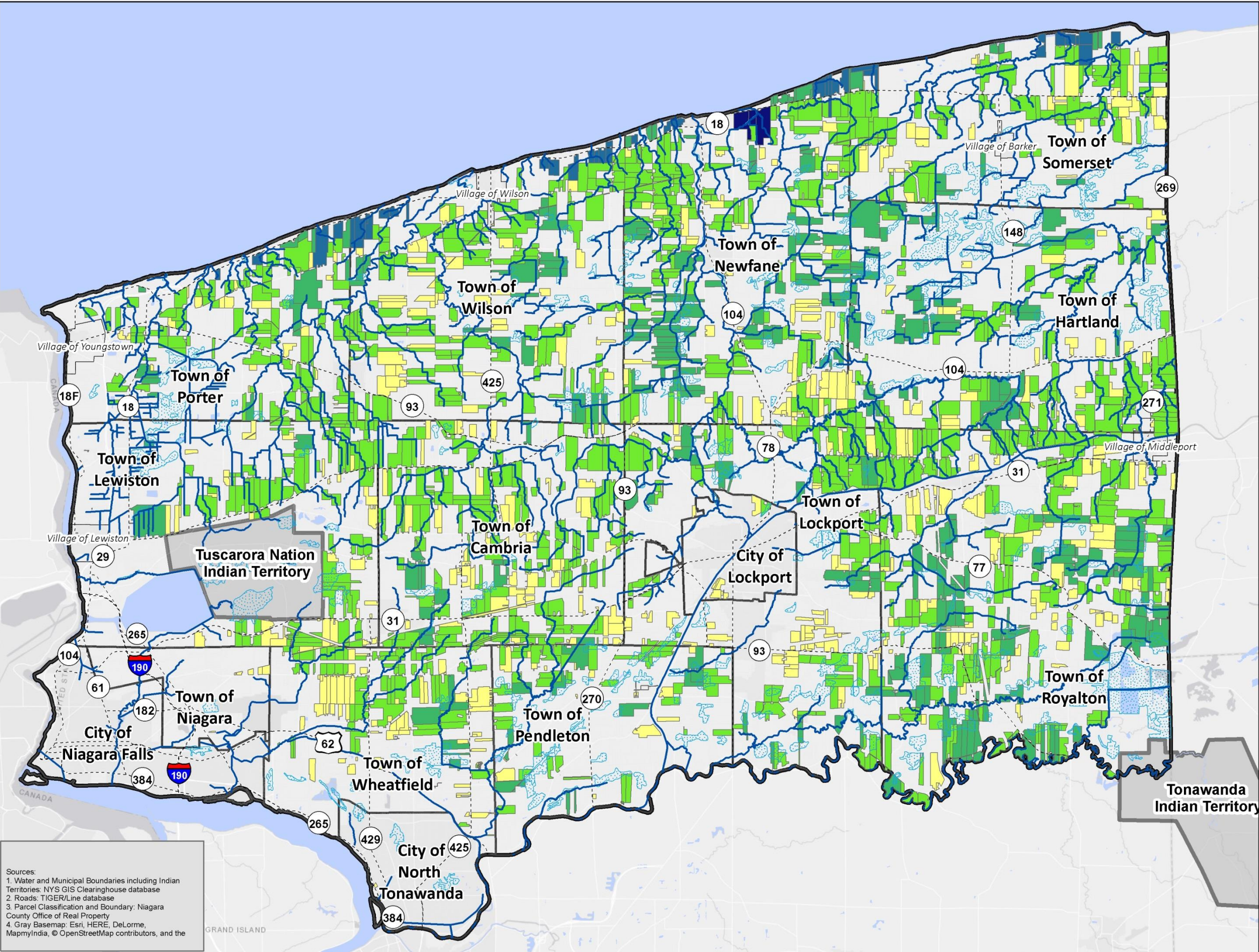
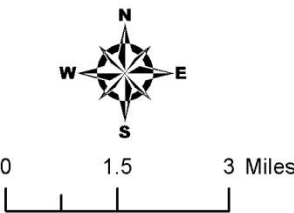
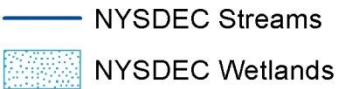
LESA Rating -
Natural Resources

Figure 8. LESA Ratings –Natural
Resources

Natural Resources
Rating



Natural Features

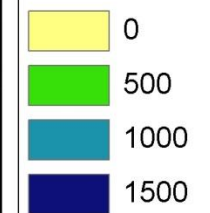


Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian
Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Roads: TIGER/Line database
3. Parcel Classification and Boundary: Niagara
County Office of Real Property
4. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme,
MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the

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PLAN

LESA Rating - Development Pressure

Figure 9. LESA Ratings –
Development Pressure
**Development
Pressure Rating**



Regional Framework for Growth

Policy Areas

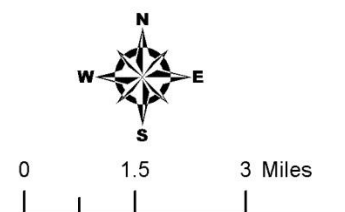


Major Roads

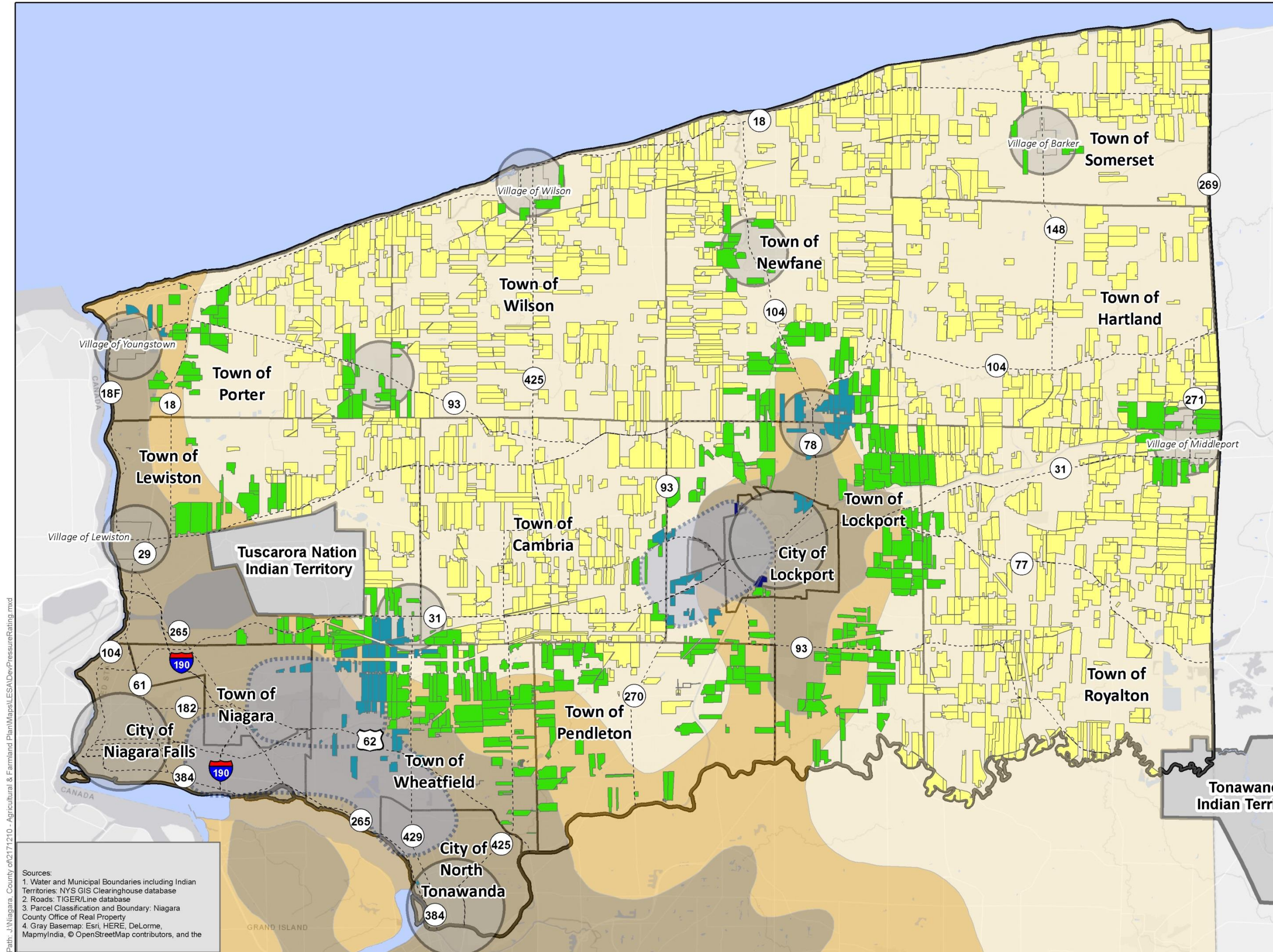
Water

Indian Territories

Municipal
Boundaries



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Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Roads: TIGER/Line database
3. Parcel Classification and Boundary: Niagara County Office of Real Property
4. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the

NIAGARA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND
PLAN

LESA Rating -
Combined Score

LESA Rating

Ag Soils +
Development
Pressure + Natural
Resources

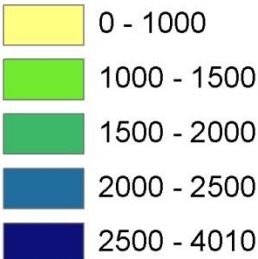
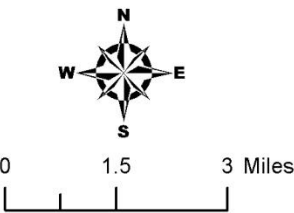


Figure 10. LESA Ratings –
Combined scores



Sources:
1. Water and Municipal Boundaries including Indian
Territories: NYS GIS Clearinghouse database
2. Roads: TIGER/Line database
3. Parcel Classification and Boundary: Niagara
County Office of Real Property
4. Gray Basemap: Esri, HERE, DeLorme,
MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the

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CONVERSION PRESSURE

Although the number of acres in farms stayed the same between 2007 and 2012, and the number of acres harvested increased, the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses continues to be a concern. The pressure to develop farmland for residences, solar farms and other uses is especially strong in areas with strong demand for rural residents. Economic pressures, such as reduced commodity prices, can also lead farmers to sell land to developers.

Conversion pressure is highest in those municipalities that are closest to the cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda and Lockport. Demand for housing in these areas, in particular, has resulted in conversion of farmland for residential development. In more rural parts of Niagara County, farmland has been in demand for solar farms and wind energy development.

FARM FRIENDLY ZONING AUDITS

An analysis of zoning ordinances in five Niagara County municipalities was prepared to audit provisions that "unreasonably restrict" farming operations per the New York State Agricultural Districts law (Appendix C). Zoning ordinances in the Towns of Lockport, Newfane, Pendleton, Royalton and Wheatfield were selected as many of them are experiencing development pressure or have a significant amount of high quality farmland.

Generally, a law unreasonably restricts agriculture and farming operations if it impacts a property in a designated Agricultural District and is not related to the health and safety of the community. Examples of where communities often unreasonably restrict agriculture include:

- Definitions and Permitted Uses – if the use is an actual farming operation or produces income for the farm from its products, those uses cannot be restricted.
- Minimum acreage requirements – some farms can operate on small farms of 10 acres and some parcels are small but are part of a larger farm operation.
- Special Use Requirement – requiring a special use permit for certain types of farming would likely be unreasonably restrictive.
- Site Plan Requirement – as site plans don't restrict uses, and are generally used to protect health and safety, they are generally acceptable as a land use control.
- Setbacks – setbacks for certain farm uses may be reasonable to protect health and safety (manure spreading, to prevent runoff to streams or roadways).
- Roadside Stands – these were allowed in all the municipalities but one community only allowed sales of products produced on the property it is sold which is unreasonable as farms operate on multiple parcels in multiple communities.

Similarly, the zoning ordinance could promote agriculture (see text box on next page – Planning and Zoning Techniques).

TOOLS TO PROTECT FARMLAND AND AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

Municipalities and landowners in Niagara County can utilize tools to protect farmland and agricultural operations. These are especially relevant for the Towns of Wheatfield, Pendleton, and Lockport where sprawl is spreading to farmland. Most Niagara County municipalities encourage or promote these in their Comprehensive Plans (Appendix B):

Conservation Easements: Easement on agricultural land to protect agricultural operations and prohibit other types of development can be donated, sold, leased or transferred. They can be permanent or for a specified term.

Purchase of Development Rights: A landowner can sell the development rights of a farm to a land trust or governmental entity. The value of development rights is the difference between the appraised land value if developed and the appraised land value if maintained for agricultural operations.

Transfer of Development Rights: If permitted by a municipality, development rights of an agricultural property (sending area) can be sold to developers to develop at higher densities in designated receiving areas.

Purchase or Donation of Land: Municipalities or Counties could purchase land to protect agricultural lands or property owners could simply donate land to municipalities or land trusts.

Agricultural Districts Program: Encouraging farmers to participate in the Agricultural Districts program will increase the long term economic viability of farmland and its continued use as farmland.

Planning and Zoning Techniques: There are various zoning techniques that could be adopted to protect farmland or increase agricultural viability:

- Update Comprehensive Plans by ensuring the future land use map designates areas for agricultural uses as well as providing recommendations that support farming, agricultural uses and agricultural economic development including agritourism.
- Update Zoning – various text or map changes could protect farming:
 - Have an agricultural zone with text that limits non-farm uses and non-farm dwellings.
 - Provide buffer zones that are a transition between densely developed zones and agricultural zones – the zone may be a hybrid that allows low density residential development with farming operations.
 - Permit cluster zoning (or planned unit development zones) which allows increased densities on a part of a parcel while leaving the remainder undeveloped.
 - Review zoning to ensure that regulations for signs, accessory uses, on-site farm sales, agritourism, breweries, distilleries, wineries and similar uses are permitted.
 - Updating the list of Type 1 SEQRA actions locally, in addition to the standard state Type 1 actions, to include the conversion of agricultural lands.
 - Regulate Wind and Solar Projects (< 25MW) via zoning and SEQR.

Restrict Extension of Water and Sewer Utilities: Municipalities could restrict lateral extensions to non-agricultural parcels in areas where utilities already exist or restrict construction of utilities in agricultural zones. Similarly municipalities could restrict the expenditure of local funding for utilities to only parcels within an Agricultural District.

Utility Scale Wind and Solar Facilities Control: Ensure communities participate in projects via the state funded Article 10 intervenor program.

EXISTING PLANS AND STUDIES

Local and regional plans focused on community, economic and agricultural development were reviewed to identify recommendations, goals, strategies and concepts that are relevant to protecting farmland and agriculture in Niagara County. Regional plans were reviewed first to provide a regional framework followed by a review of Niagara County Plans. Plan recommendations were considered when developing goals, strategies and recommendations.

STRATEGY FOR PROSPERITY IN WESTERN NEW YORK (2011)

The Western New York Regional Economic Development Council's Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York⁵ identifies priority economic development projects to be funded through the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) process. Agriculture and tourism are two of the region's Key Sectors. Smart Growth is one of the "Core Strategies." The Plan's Agenda for the agriculture sector recommends that the region:

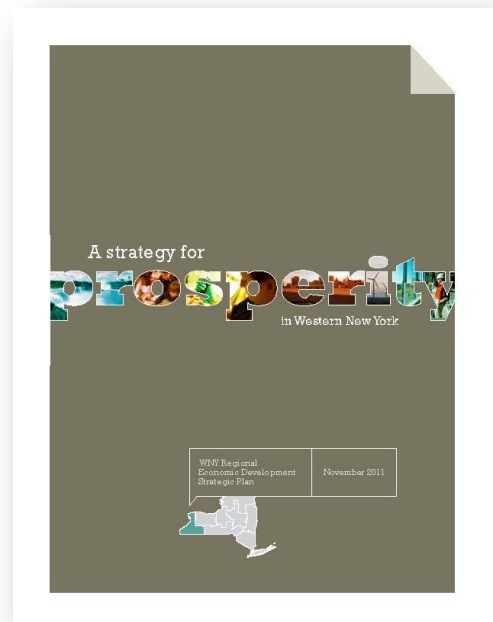
- Collaborate to create and promote a regional brand for local food and agriculture products
- Increase innovation to improve products, processes, market links
- Promote careers in agriculture

Business development recommendations include:

- Create and participate in a state-wide committee to review existing agricultural regulations to reduce cost and burden on agricultural businesses and streamline licensing/permitting processes
- Encourage the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to adopt the Federal EPA regulations for agricultural materials, such as pesticides

Key Accomplishments of the REDC's Agriculture Work Group include:

- Support for the Niagara Wine Trail project
- Strategies to implement a regional branding initiative for agriculture
- Explored the development of a regional food hub
- Presentations/research on NYS pesticide regulation and the Erie County Food System study

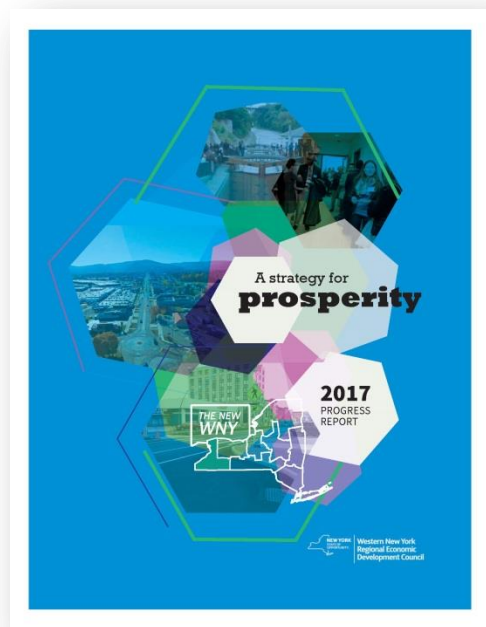


⁵ https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2017-11/A_Strategy_for_Prosperty_in_Western_New_York_November_2011.pdf

A STRATEGY FOR PROSPERITY 2017 PROGRESS REPORT (2017)

The Western New York Regional Economic Development Council's 2017 Progress Report⁶ noted, "agriculture is WNY's fastest growing sector with much of the growth attributed to the growing number of small businesses with specialty products." Three of the Priority Projects identified in the Plan and funded through CFA grants benefit Niagara County Agriculture:

- Farm Credit East received \$1 million for a Value Added Direct Marketing grant program (2012) to purchase equipment, machinery or building construction for value-added direct-to-market projects.
- BeauVine Vineyards in Lockport (2015) received \$370,000 to add a grape processing building and additional acreage to increase its grape crop for wine production.
- The Niagara Falls Culinary Institute, completed in 2014, is a 90,000 square foot, mixed use facility in a portion of the former Rainbow Centre Mall that features state-of-the-art teaching kitchens, a student-run fine dining restaurant and community education kitchen, as well as commercial space for ventures such as a wine boutique, pastry shop and book store.
- The Niagara Wine Trail received a \$30,000 grant in 2011 to support marketing.



⁶ <https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2017-11/2017ProgressReportWesternNY.pdf>

WESTERN NEW YORK REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN (2013)

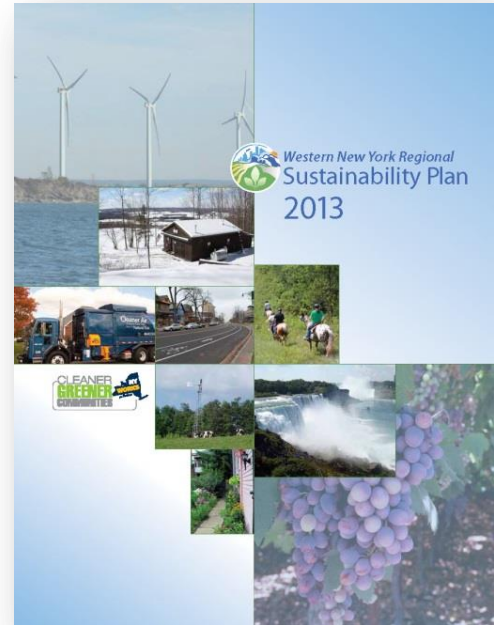
The Western New York Regional Sustainability Plan ⁷ identifies goals and recommends initiatives to promote the region's sustainability. The Plan promotes the economic viability of agriculture and forestry as well as sustainable land use and livable communities. Several projects recommended in the Plan may receive implementation funding through NYSERDA.

Relevant goals include:

- Strengthen the economic viability of agriculture and forestry enterprises
- Achieve more efficient uses of energy inputs and maximize utilization of agriculture and forestry by-products for energy production
- Increase support from government officials and the public for the protection of farmland, continued use of farmland for agricultural practices, and for strengthening the business climate for agriculture and forestry in the region
- Promote environmentally sustainable management systems for the agriculture and forestry sector

Recommended projects included:

- WNY mobile meat processing unit
- Farmer Recruitment Program
- Small Farm Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program
- WNY Small-Scale Food Processing Center
- WNY Food Hub Project



⁷ <http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/wny-sustainability-plan/>

ONE REGION FORWARD: A NEW WAY TO PLAN FOR BUFFALO NIAGARA (2015)

The One Region Forward⁸ is a planning effort funded through a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The plan explores ideas and potential strategies to align the region's actions to their values, providing a basic framework for moving the region towards a more sustainable, resilient, prosperous and opportunity-rich future.

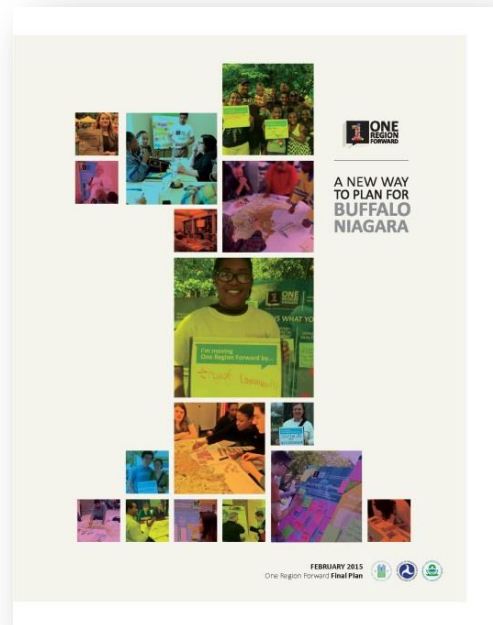
Relevant "Big Ideas" and Strategies include:

Create great places and a thriving economy through efficient land use

- Develop a land use pattern that supports our region values
- Promote a more compact pattern of development
- Protect and restore natural places and farmland
- Preserve land through purchase and conservation easement

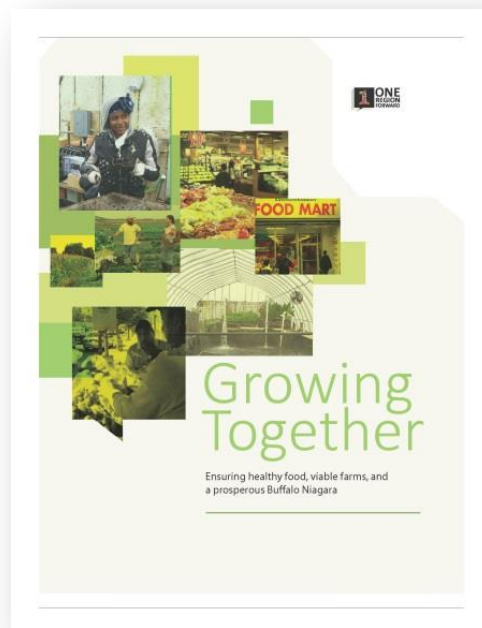
Strengthen our food systems for a healthier population and economy

- Create the structure for developing and advancing food policy
- Increase awareness about food system issues across the board
- Ensure a reliable supply of labor for food production and processing
- Address farm worker immigration issues
- Strengthen regional farm to table links
- Preserve agricultural land



⁸ <http://www.oneregionforward.org/the-plan/>

Nearly all of the 38 recommended “Ideas for the Future” presented in Section 8 of the plan are relevant to Niagara County farmland and agribusiness. “The ideas have three broad themes: to improve consumer food access, to strengthen farm viability, and to connect underserved consumers with local growers.” The recommended ideas are broken into three categories including policy change (e.g., modify federal food subsidies to incentivize fruit and vegetable production), program development (e.g., make CSAs more affordable and accessible), and physical infrastructure (e.g., build farms’ capacity to harvest rainwater).



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NIAGARA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN (1999)

The 1999 Niagara County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan documented agricultural land and the economic impact of agriculture, identified agricultural areas to be preserved, and analyzed conversion pressure. The Plan recommended the following strategies:

Agricultural Economic Development Strategies

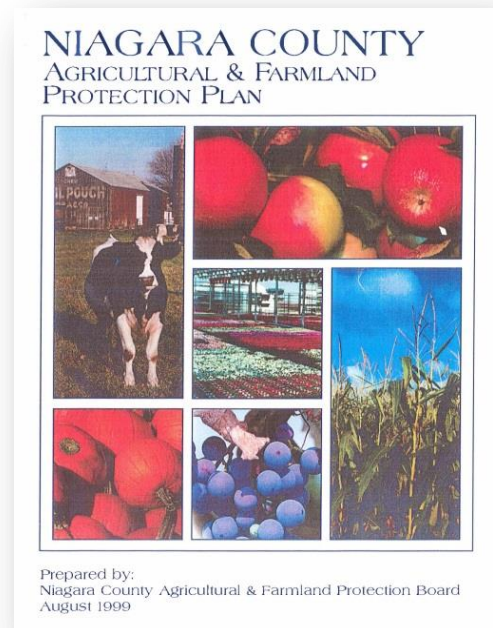
1. Establish an agricultural economic dev. coordinator
2. Strengthen the economic viability of farm businesses
3. Build on a "Buy Local" campaign
4. Set up a county revolving loan fund for farms
5. Favor economic dev. that supports agriculture
6. Encourage farm cooperatives
7. Develop an Eastern Niagara County Farmers Market
8. Support and promote local farm stands, etc.
9. Create a cooperative food-processing kitchen
10. Develop a County marketing packet for agriculture
11. Identify barriers to local farms' vitality
12. Address the impact of high utility rates on agriculture

Government Policies and Farmland Protection Strategies

1. Educate local government officials about impacts of land use and taxation on farms
2. Have the County AFPB review town comprehensive plans prior to formal adoption
3. Allow for development plans which retain land for future agricultural uses
4. Study means of treating equitably, farmers who are discouraged about the future of farming
5. Encourage in-fill development prior to extending municipal services and developing farmland
6. Educate elected local and appointed officials about protection methods
7. Pass right-to-farm laws in all townships and the County
8. Evaluate priority lands for purchase of development rights or conservation easements
9. Increase the quality/ diversity of wildlife habitat
10. Conduct a land evaluation-site analysis (LESA) of farmland
11. Consider instituting revolving loan programs in Niagara County

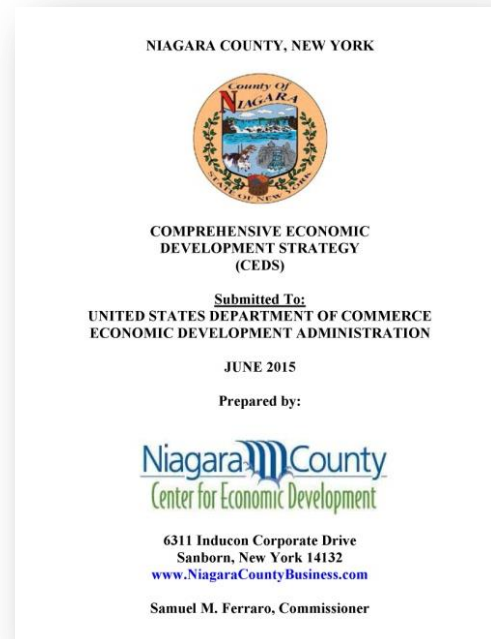
Education, Promotion and Public Relations Strategies

1. Improve consumer awareness of farming and available produce
2. Improve awareness among decision makers about economic value of agriculture
3. Mentor young people who are attracted to farming but don't know how to get started
4. Develop a coordinated public school program to educate youth about agriculture
5. Educate non-farm neighbors about farming practices and ways to coexist with agriculture
6. Provide education in the profession
7. Work with the media to present an accurate image of agriculture
8. Educate new homeowners on rural living and assessors about farmland assessment



NIAGARA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (2015)

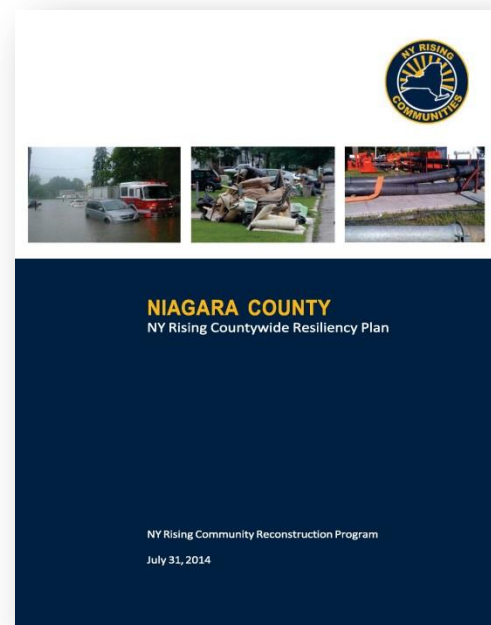
Niagara County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), submitted to the U.S. Dept. of Commerce Economic Development Administration in 2015, presents Niagara County's economic development strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, establishes goals and objectives, and recommends specific actions and projects. Agriculture is a key sector of Niagara County's economy and contributes to the quality of life for the people of Niagara County. As such, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats; Objectives; and Key Strategies relating to agriculture and associated businesses were discussed within the plan. In addition to countywide goals, the Town and Village of Wilson identified reuse of the former Pfeiffer plant as a key municipal priority as well as expanding the Woodcock Brothers Brewery to include a bottling facility, and establishing an agricultural museum.



NIAGARA COUNTY NY RISING COUNTYWIDE RESILIENCY PLAN (2014)

The Niagara County NY Rising Countywide Resiliency Plan identifies future storm risks and presents strategies and projects to increase resiliency in future flood events. These projects may be eligible for State funding through the NY Rising program, or could be implemented through other Federal, State, local or non-profit funding sources or grants.

To reduce erosion from agricultural land, the Resiliency Plan recommends a program to increase use of "no till" techniques and application of cover crops. The estimated cost of cover crops is \$80/acre. The Niagara County Soil & Water Conservation District would be a key partner in administering the program.



NIAGARA COMMUNITIES COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2030 A PLAN TO COMMUNICATE, COLLABORATE & CONNECT (2009)

The Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan, completed in 2009, found that:

- Population and housing are increasingly located away from cities and developed areas and into the rural and agricultural parts of the County
- Conversion of farmland has extended into rural towns such as Cambria, Newfane and Somerset
- The cost for infrastructure and services in spread-out development are higher than those for compact patterns

The plan's Farmland and Open Space Protection and Economic Development goals are to:

- Preserve and protect the long-term viability of prime, unique and important farmlands
- Attract and retain economic activity by preserving the county's natural and cultural resources through sustainable practices

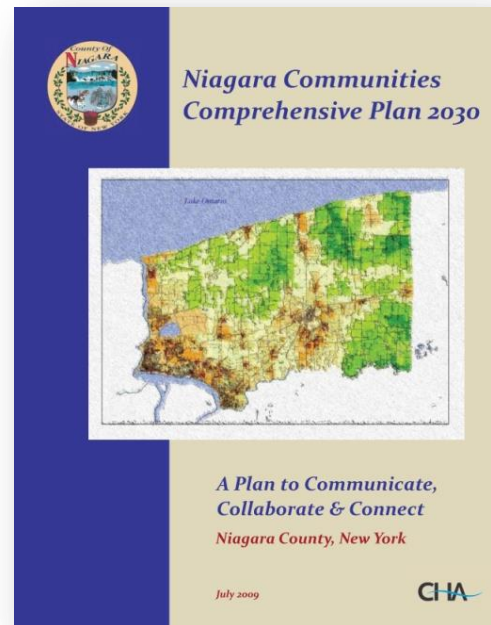
The Plan's Land Use objectives are to:

- Encourage new development to locate in and around existing population centers
- Preserve the amount of viable agricultural land from conversion to other uses
- Reduce development pressure on farmland

Recommended actions include land protection through conservation easements, zoning to direct development away from high quality farmland, and economic support for farms and agribusinesses.

Economic Development objectives relating to agriculture are to:

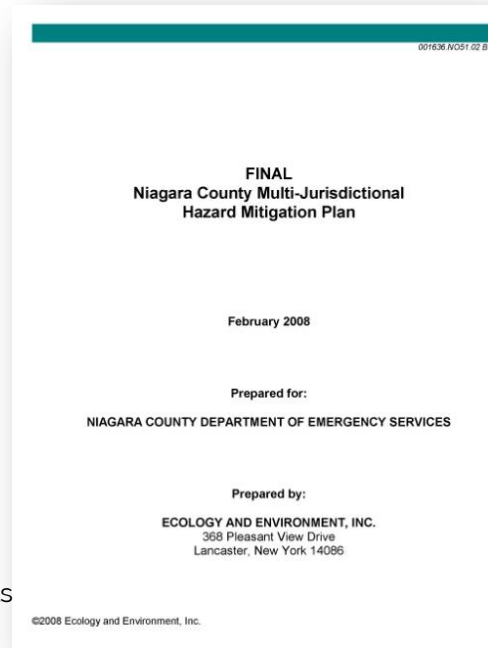
- Continue to protect natural and cultural resources and examine ways to improve countywide stewardship of the environment
- Improve tourism and tourism-based business opportunities throughout the County
- Improve and support retention of the agriculture sector of the economy
- Reduce the cost of doing business in Niagara County
- Align education and training programs with key industry sectors and economic development priorities
- Enhance the diversification of rural economies and small businesses



NIAGARA COUNTY MULTI-HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN (2008)

In 2008, Niagara County completed a Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Niagara County Department of Emergency Services. The Plan identifies "agricultural lands" as critical because they are the predominant land use in the County. Two farms are included in the database of "Critical Infrastructure" (Atwater and Chaffee Farms). The database also lists two agricultural support businesses that use or store hazardous chemicals (FMC Corp and Middleport Cold Storage in Middleport) and three food manufacturers (Barker Storage, Mayer Brothers Somerset Division, and Shafer's Farm in Middleport).

The Plan notes that agriculture may become a source of water contamination. If water lines break, residents will be vulnerable to contamination from manure and/or chemicals from agriculture.

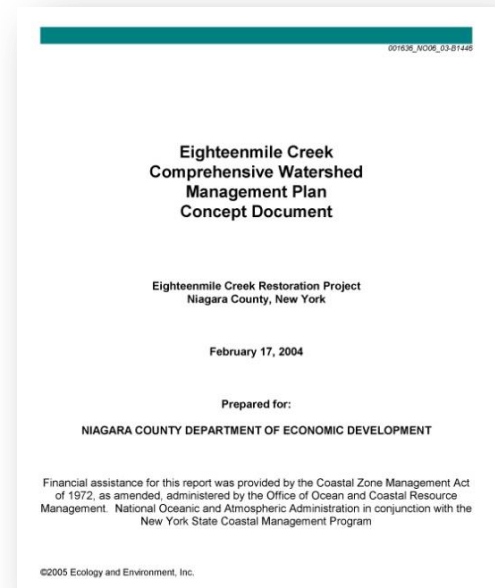


EIGHTEENMILE CREEK COMPREHENSIVE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN (2004)

The Eighteenmile Creek Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan examined land use, soils, ecology, and water quality within the watershed of Eighteenmile Creek. The primary goal of the plan is to maintain and improve water quality.

Recommended management activities relating to farmland and agriculture include:

- Agricultural best management practices
- Plans to manage agricultural drainage
- Soils management
- Integrated pest management



NIAGARA ESCARPMENT LEGACY PROJECT (2014)

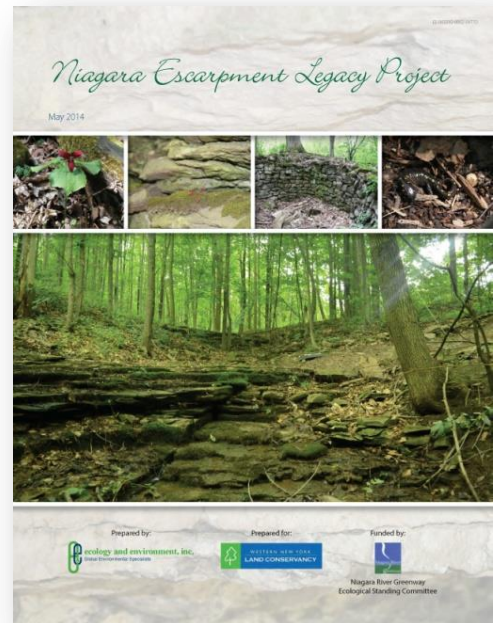
The Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project, an initiative of the Western New York Land Conservancy, identified significant natural heritage areas in the Niagara County portion of the Niagara Escarpment and recommended actions to preserve, restore, and enhance these resources. The following strategies and recommendations relate to farmland and agriculture:

Strategy 3-2: *Expand and promote existing agricultural enterprises along the escarpment*

- Support Field & Fork network and programs of the Western NY Land Conservancy and Farm Bureau

Strategy 3-3: *Educate the public and elected officials on the economic benefits of open space*

- Provide information about how farmland and other open spaces enhance the character of a community; economic benefits such as reduced infrastructure costs and increased property values; and the value of "ecosystem services" such as flood control, reduction in air pollution, improved water quality, increase in wildlife habitat, alleviation of traffic congestion, and encouragement of healthy lifestyles.



PROGRAMS AND PARTNERS

Several innovative initiatives are currently underway in Niagara County that advances the objectives of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan to:

- Protect high quality farmland
- Expand agritourism
- Increase purchases of local farm products
- Expand and strengthen the region's agricultural economy
- Increase access to healthy foods in underserved neighborhoods
- Train and educate farmers
- Manage land use to reduce development pressure on farmland

Many government agencies, not-for-profit organizations and businesses contribute to the success of these initiatives.

PROTECT HIGH QUALITY FARMLAND

The Western New York Land Conservancy has acquired conservation easements from several farms in Niagara County, as described below. By removing the development rights to these parcels, these lands are permanently protected and available for continued agricultural production.

Singer Farm. The Western New York Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement to 12.4 acres in the Town of Newfane. Located on the shores of Lake Ontario, the property includes an apple orchard and forest.

Walker Farm. The Western New York Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement to 55.7 acres in the Town of Royalton. Located within the Eighteenmile Creek watershed, the property includes hay fields and seasonal wetlands.

Human Road Farm. The Western New York Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement to the 92.7 acre in the Town of Cambria. The land has been used to produce corn, hay, soybeans and wheat and helps protect the water quality of Bergholtz Creek.

Coulter Farm. The Western NY Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement to more than 40 acres of cropland and orchards, 50 acres of forest, and nearly half a mile long stretch of Twelve-Mile Creek in Cambria and Wilson. The Coulter Farm features a Farm Market and pick-your-own (PYO) berries.

EXPAND AGRITOURISM

The Niagara Wine Trail, breweries, farm markets, and on-farm attractions draw some of the millions of tourists who visit Niagara Falls each year as well as local residents and visitors from nearby communities. Niagara County has the opportunity to increase tourism in areas outside of Niagara

Falls with farmers markets, on-farm sales, and entertainment and recreational activities. In addition to sales of local farm products, these businesses contribute to the regional economy.

NIAGARA WINE TRAIL

The Niagara Wine Trail has successfully built a market for tourism in the rural areas of the County. The Niagara Wine Trail is a NY-designated trail that includes 21 wineries in Niagara, Orleans and Monroe Counties. The location between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario has a unique micro-climate ideal for growing grapes and fruit. Winery tours, tastings and events are advertised on the website, with brochures, and through social media.

EATFRESH WNY WEBSITE

The EatFresh WNY website offers information about local food and agritourism attractions, including maps, events, restaurants and direct sales venues. Travelers as well as local residents can access information about events and where to purchase local farm products. The mobile friendly website and app developed by the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County, with support from the Niagara County Farm Bureau, connects residents and tourists with the local food culture.



INCREASE PURCHASES OF LOCAL FARM PRODUCTS

Increasing sales of local agricultural products helps to support farms in Niagara County. Farms that produce fruits, vegetables, and meats are most likely to benefit from "buy local" initiatives.

FARMERS MARKETS

Farmers Markets allow farmers to sell directly to consumers, and offer opportunities for residents to buy fresh, local food. Farmers Markets in Niagara County are located in Lockport, Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, and Pendleton.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSAS)

Community Supported Agriculture describes a variety of arrangements that allow farmers to sell shares of their products to consumers on a subscription or membership basis. Farmers benefit through guaranteed income and a market in advance of the season. Consumers receive a consistent supply of fresh, quality produce.

FARM-TO-INSTITUTION

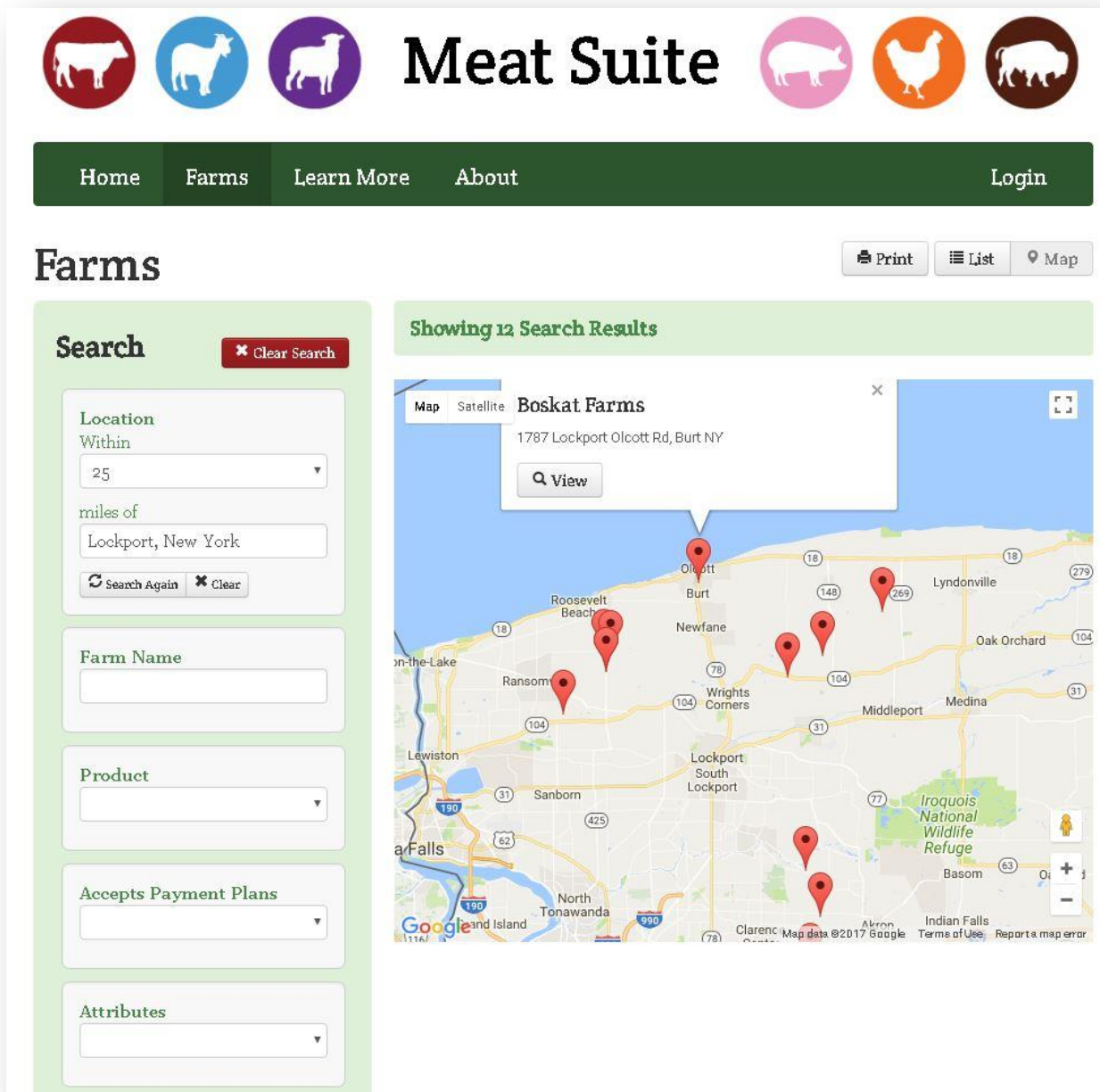
Niagara County CCE launched the Farm-to-School Project in early 2017 with funding from the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets. A coordinator works with all 10 school districts to train staff on the procurement and use of specialty crops in school meal programs. There is potential for other institutions in Niagara County to increase their purchases of local farm products.

NEW YORK GROWN CERTIFICATION

The New York State New York Grown certification is in demand among Niagara County farmers to boost sales. The certification requires participation in Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) as well as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification.

MEAT SUITE

Meat Suite is a website and app that matches consumers with farmers who produce local, high quality meats in bulk for sale. Producers can register to be listed and consumers can search for beef, pork, poultry, or lamb as well as grass-fed, pasture-raised, and other categories.



EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN THE REGION'S AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

The regional agricultural economy includes farms, food manufacturing, wineries and breweries, distributors, storage, retail and wholesale, and services to farms. When farms and related businesses in Niagara County buy and sell from other local businesses, these connections help to strengthen the overall agricultural economy and help support employees and their families.

WNY FOOD INCUBATOR

The WNY Food Incubator, located on the campus of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County, provides technical assistance, business services, a commercial kitchen, and storage facility to small and mid-sized farms that want to produce value-added products.

See: <http://cceniagaracounty.org/agriculture/buy-local/wny-food-enterprise-center>

Contact: Kaitlin Pettine, CCE Assistant Director, kms423@cornell.edu, (716) 433-8898 ext. 238

FARM CREDIT EAST

Farm Credit East offers a variety of financing products as well as technical assistance to farmers.

The Agriculture Development Fund, administered by Farm Credit East, offers grant funding up to \$50,000 to farmers to buy equipment or machinery or to construct buildings for value-added direct-to-market ventures. Eleven projects have been funded as of October 2017.¹⁰

NIAGARA COUNTY CULINARY INSTITUTE

The Niagara Falls Culinary Institute, affiliated with Niagara County Community College, features a restaurant that uses local agricultural products and educational programs for students interested in food and agriculture-related fields. Training of students in wine production, craft beer, distilling, food service and hospitality will help Niagara County businesses find qualified employees in these fields.

FOOD HUB

Food hub projects in Western New York offer a model for Niagara County as well as an alternative means for farmers in Niagara County to market their fresh produce and meats. Examples of food hubs in the region include the Massachusetts Avenue Project in Buffalo and Eden Valley Growers in southern Erie County. Centralized distribution services help small farms, in particular, get their specialty products to markets.

¹⁰ Source: "A Strategy for Prosperity, WNY Regional Economic Development Council 2017 Progress Report, p. 24

INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS IN UNDERSERVED NEIGHBORHOODS

Several programs are utilized in Niagara County in order to increase access to healthy foods in underserved neighborhoods, including the Veggie Van, community gardens, and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

The Veggie Van, a mobile farmers market, brings fresh produce to neighborhoods in Niagara Falls and Lackawanna.

Community gardens in Niagara Falls allow City residents to grow their own fruits and vegetables.

The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program distributes coupons that can be used at farmers markets for the purchase of produce only. Farmers markets also exchange SNAP/ Food Stamps for tokens that can be used to purchase food from vendors.

See: <http://cceniagaracounty.org/agriculture/buy-local/using-ebt-coupons>

Contact: Amanda Henning, CCE Agriculture & Food Systems Educator, app27@cornell.edu, (716) 433-8839 ext. 231

TRAIN AND EDUCATE FARMERS

Farmers require information and training in many topics, in addition to the technical aspects of farming. These include business planning, marketing, succession planning, land conservation, and environmental protection.

Cornell Cooperative Extension's regional teams offer science-based training and technical support with Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops; Vegetables; Grapes; and Fruit farming. CCE also offers workshops and training programs to assist with establishing a new farm, estate and succession planning, land conservation and other topics.

Training in how to achieve certification in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) helps farmers gain access to many retail outlets, food hubs, and distributors and helps to ensure that produce meets health and safety standards.

MANAGE LAND USE TO REDUCE DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE ON FARMLAND

Sprawling development in Niagara County has resulted in loss of farmland as residential and other development occurs in areas outside of cities and other historically settled areas. The authority to manage land use rests solely with local governments through local land use laws and regulations. Infrastructure and transportation policies have contributed to development in agricultural areas.

**AGRICULTURAL AND
FARMLAND PROTECTION
PLAN**

NIAGARA COUNTY

**Section II:
Public &
Stakeholder Input**



A comprehensive public and stakeholder outreach effort has been implemented as part of the Niagara Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. Outreach efforts included:

- Steering Committee meetings
- A tour of area farms
- Attendance and promotion of the plan at two Cornell Cooperative Extension events – the Annual Fair and the Annual Dinner
- Focus groups
- Farmer and Stakeholder interviews
- Consumer survey
- Farmer and Landowner surveys

Community input from the various outreach efforts were consolidated into a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis relating to farmland and the agricultural economy of Niagara County.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee that guided the planning process included members of the Niagara County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board as well as staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County and the Niagara County Department of Economic Development. The Steering Committee provided valuable input and feedback throughout the duration of the project.

The Steering Committee met four times to review products and provide input on the following:

- June 8, 2017 – Kickoff meeting to introduce the project, discuss the project scope and schedule and conduct a SWOT analysis
- December 13, 2017 – Review of existing conditions and discussion of input to date from the Farmer Survey, Consumer Survey, and interviews
- February 28, 2018 – Discuss goals and strategies, key projects, and next steps
- July 17, 2018 – Review draft report and prepare for public presentation

FARM TOUR

A Farm Tour held on July 18, 2017 offered opportunities for decision-makers, farmers and the public to learn about the Niagara County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan and visit four diverse farms. The tour stopped at Niagara Landing Wine Cellar, New Royal Orchards, Verratti Dairy Farm and McCollum Orchards. A farm-to-table dinner was then provided to tour participants.

Participants learned a lot from the farmers including:

- In the winery business, labeling is a major issue that restricts how a business can promote its product
- Wine tours and sales from those tours is a very small percentage of income for the farmers/owners, but the wine tours are critical for marketing
- Unfortunately, machinery to make wine must be purchased outside of the United States
- Taxes, tariffs, labor, succession, utility costs, housing for labor, and regulations are an issue
- Cheaper agricultural products from Ontario, Canada is hurting some farmers
- Washington State cherries are cheaper and bigger
- Fruit trees are now being planted at a very high density for more yield
- While not as bad as Orleans County, there are limited wide bridges over the Canal which can be a major issue for farmers, especially with those that have property on both sides of the canal



Farm tour participants at a winery, apple orchard and dairy

CCE NIAGARA COUNTY FAIR AND ANNUAL DINNER

To get additional input from the public and farming community, consultants for the Niagara County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan attended the Niagara County Annual Fair and Annual Dinner. A display booth was staffed at both events which provided a flyer on the Plan, posters about Niagara County Agriculture, and an opportunity to provide input through a brief survey.

The fair booth was popular and 166 people completed the survey which asked basic questions about preferences for farm products and perception of farming in Niagara County. Some of the results of the survey include:

- Most respondents seek out local fruits and vegetables when shopping
- More than 50% of participants sought out local maple syrup, plants and eggs when shopping
- Most respondents think farming is important to the economy and quality of life in Niagara County, but most believe that Niagara County residents do not know where their food comes from



Fairgoers fill out surveys at the Niagara County Fair for the Plan

A large majority of the 166 respondents seek out and purchase locally produced farm products. The local products purchased include:

- Cherries, apples, peaches or other tree fruit (89%)
- Vegetables (85%)
- Berries (74%)
- Eggs (61%)
- Maple Syrup (56%)
- Plants (53%)
- Wine/Beer/Cider (45%)
- Cheese (44%)
- Meat and/or Poultry (44%)
- Butter (24%)

Almost all respondents agree that,

- Farmland is important to the quality of life in their community (99%)
- Farmland in Niagara County should be preserved and protected (98%)
- Farming and agriculture contribute significantly to the regional economy (96%)
- Farmers are good stewards of the environment (93%)

More than 80% of respondents agree that,

- They are aware of the Niagara County Wine Trail (87%)
- Farmers pay their fair share of property taxes (82%)
- It is important to purchase more organic farm products (81%)

Only 67% of respondents agree that, "Niagara County residents know where their food comes from."

FOCUS GROUPS

Two focus group meetings were held to better understand the perspectives of local governments and agritourism operations. The Local Government focus group and the Agritourism focus group were both held on February 15, 2018 at Cornell Cooperative Extension. Notes from these meetings are included in the Appendices

Local government representatives, including Town Board members, Planning Board members, a County Legislator, and several Highway Superintendents, discussed the following concerns:

- Traffic and other impacts from large agritourism operations
- Effect on Town roads from heavy farm equipment
- Managing drainage
- Pressure to convert farmland to other uses.

Representatives of the agritourism industry, including wineries, Pick-your-own (PYO) operations and the Niagara Wine Trail, identified the following challenges and opportunities:

- Agritourism operators need to communicate regularly with local government representatives and neighbors when planning new or expanded facilities or events
- Need to attract visitors from Buffalo and Niagara Falls
- Directional signage needed to direct people to wineries that are not located along major roadways
- Agritourism venues need to offer a quality experience to visitors. High quality products are not sufficient.

FARMER AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews with farmers, agri-business operators, and agency representatives revealed diverse perspectives on the strengths of and challenges facing agriculture in Niagara County. In-person or phone interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders:

Agency stakeholders	Farmers	Agri-businesses
• Niagara County Soil & Water Conservation District (District Manager and Agricultural Environmental Management Specialist) • Nathan Rudgers, Farm Credit East • Cathy Lovejoy Maloney and Amanda Henning, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County • Rachel Chrostowski, Western New York Land Conservancy	• Bree and Rich Woodbridge, McCollum Orchards • Krys McCarthy, McB's Hoof and Feather Farm • Randy Byington, Woodcock Brothers • Danny Sievert, Lakeview Orchards	• Christine Britt, Hartland Abbatoir • Brett Rhinehart, WH Rhinehart • Steve Reisen, Sun Orchard Fruit Company

Farmers and stakeholders identified the following strengths and assets:

- Good land
- Innovative, forward-thinking farmers
- Strong institutional support (Cornell Cooperative Extension, FFA in Middleport, Niagara Wine Trail)
- Growing market for local foods, wine/beer/distilling, and niche products

Issues and challenges include:

- Milk prices, competition from other states and countries
- Regulations and taxes
- Lack of public understanding of farm practices/where food comes from
- Tenuous funding for CCE programs
- Cost of utilities, drainage improvements
- Lack of skilled labor/immigration policies

Opportunities and potential initiatives include:

- Capitalize on proximity to markets for local food
- Establish additional meat processing capacity
- Educate consumers
- Assist farmers in reaching consumers
- Grow niche products
- Increase State funding to assist farmers with GAP certification and training
- Strengthen ties between local farms and distributors/packers/processors/retail outlets
- Increase sales of local products to institutions
- Lobby NYS to create an income tax credit to offset cost of land improvements (e.g., drainage)

FARMER AND LANDOWNER SURVEYS

Niagara County received 142 Farmer and Landowner survey responses. That is a good response rate and the leading responses include:

- Farmers would appreciate help with:
 - Marketing
 - Agritourism
 - On-farm sales
- Most full time farmers utilize wholesale distributors to sell their product; most part time farmers utilize retail outlets to sell their products
- Most farmers would like to promote:
 - Lower taxes
 - Wind/Solar opportunities on their property
 - Farmer friendly zoning

A complete analysis of the results of the Farmer and Landowner survey can be found in the Appendices.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS (SWOT) ANALYSIS

The Steering Committee met in June 2017 to kick of the project. One of the first activities the group conducted was a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats exercise. The process helped the Steering Committee and LaBella Associates understand what some key issues were within the agricultural community and also helped provide a framework for the study. The comments received for the SWOT exercise follow.

CURRENT STRENGTHS

- Proximity to Canadian border (when there is a favorable exchange rate)
- NYS Right to Farm Law
- High quality soils
- Flat topography
- Water supply on every road
- Multi-generational farms
- Agricultural/Farming Heritage as base to support new farming
- Enough critical mass of agriculture to support local equipment/supply businesses
- Agritourism
- New farmers emerging – all ages, second careers, etc. – vegetables, fruit, cattle, hops
- Cornell Cooperative support and private consultant assistance
- Price of land
- Favorable micro-climate

CURRENT WEAKNESSES

- Sprawl
- Proximity to Canadian border (when there is an unfavorable exchange rate)
- Stuck in "corner of state", regionally an "orphan" with attention paid to the Buffalo region and Niagara Falls
- Local government not appreciating value of agriculture as an economic driver
- The public's general lack of awareness of the importance of agriculture
- Canal bridges
- Water supply on roads encourages strip residential development, often at odds with agricultural practices
- Lack of a market for development rights
- Mostly seasonal products (fruits, vegetables, crops), labor issues
- Lack of affluent residents nearby discourages investment and development in CSA's etc.
- Lack of high speed internet
- Lack of food and meat processing facilities

FUTURE THREATS

- Age of farmers
- Sprawl and other uses taking up valuable, prime farmland
- Future strip residential development
- Article 10 Wind Law
- Solar Farms
- Existing farmer apathy to participation in future of farming and other farm related issues

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- Agritourism
- Pushing development to cities where development is needed
- Local Food movement
 - Engages public with agriculture
 - Encourages positive attitudes toward agriculture
 - Incentives and attracts new farmers
- Variety of what can be grown in County
- More collaboration among farmers, suppliers, communities and others to support the future of agriculture

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**AGRICULTURAL AND
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NIAGARA COUNTY

**Section III:
Vision, Goals and
Strategies**



The vision, goals, and strategies offer a guide for decision making in the future and establish evaluation criteria to implement them. They support the long-term viability of agriculture in Niagara County, its quality of life, diverse land uses, and economy. The vision was created based on broad community input and feedback from the Steering Committee.

The goals are the framework for the implementation of the Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan. They address the concerns and priorities of farmers and the other stakeholders who helped prepare this plan. The strategies are approaches to realize the goals. Finally, the priority actions and other recommendations are actionable items which should be completed in order to implement the Plan.

VISION STATEMENT

A Vision Statement was developed by the Steering to provide a framework and filter for future decisions and actions related to agricultural and farmland protection in Niagara County. The Steering Committee wanted the statement to recognize the following:

- Agriculture is a key component of Niagara County's economy and future economic development activities;
- Protection of agricultural and farmland is important to retain opportunities for economic development and to provide opportunities for jobs; and
- Promotion of current agricultural activities and future opportunities in agriculture will facilitate the long term viability of agriculture in Niagara County.

Niagara County's agricultural industry will thrive by providing opportunities for economic development, protecting agricultural lands, and promoting the unique and diverse agricultural products available locally.

GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the Vision Statement provides an overall framework for the plan, the goals and strategies are intended to help Niagara County realize its vision of retaining increasingly productive and well-managed farmland that contributes significantly to the regional economy.

Goals are "big picture" concepts while the strategies outline specific outcomes desired. Goals support the Vision Statement and the strategies provide tools to implement the goals. Together, the vision, goals and strategies helped the steering committee develop the recommended actions in the next section of the plan.

The Steering Committee agreed with the following goals and strategies:

OPPORTUNITY

Niagara County will provide economic development opportunities to support agriculture and farm related businesses.

- Provide opportunities for entrepreneurship including services for the next generation of farmers
- Support agritourism
- Support services for young and new farmers
- Provide value added services to the local agricultural economy including local processing
- Expand markets for local farm products
- Utilize Cornell Cooperative Extension as a resource to facilitate the viability of agriculture in Niagara County

AWARENESS

Niagara County will promote the quality, variety, and importance of farm products and agriculture locally and regionally.

- Hold events to promote agriculture locally and regionally
- Market the County's products to local residents and the regional population
- Continue and enhance promotion of farming as a career with local schools
- Educate residents of all ages about the importance of agriculture

PROTECTION

Niagara County will protect land for agricultural production.

- Utilize conservation easements or purchase of development rights to protect valuable farmland.
- Install or maintain drainage improvements for individual parcels as well as throughout watersheds.
- Assist local communities with zoning and land use controls that protect and promote agriculture, agriculture related businesses and agritourism.
- Protect the environment, rural landscapes and viewsheds.

VIABILITY

Niagara County will facilitate the long term economic viability of agriculture.

- Educate farmers about succession planning
- Institute formal and informal training opportunities at local colleges and BOCES programs.

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**AGRICULTURAL AND
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NIAGARA COUNTY

**Section IV:
Recommendations
and Projects**



Recommended projects were developed for each of the goals established by the Steering Committee. In total there are 13 recommended projects that include five high priority projects. This section provides brief summaries of each recommended project as well as more detailed information on the high priority projects complemented with a proposed implementation plan.

OPPORTUNITY

Niagara County will provide economic development opportunities to support agriculture and farm related businesses.

O-1: Increase the number of meat processing facilities in Niagara County

Currently there are two small meat processing facilities in Niagara County and many farmers need to have meat processed outside the County. Additional Niagara County meat processing facilities would not only reduce costs farmers need to pay for processing, but it would also provide jobs and investment needed in Niagara County.

O-2 Establish or attract a cooperative produce distribution enterprise

There is also not a commercial cooperative food distributor in Niagara County. Establishing a produce co-op distribution center would facilitate distribution of Niagara County's high quality produce to regional and national wholesale markets.

O-3 Create an Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator in Niagara County

A coordinator would promote agricultural opportunities and assist agricultural businesses including helping farmers with zoning, permitting and other land use issues. The position would also act as a liaison to the legislature and help to promote agriculture within and outside Niagara County.

O-4 Integrate agritourism into Niagara County tourism activities, programs and direct consumer sales.

Niagara Falls is an international attraction that hosts 8-10 million visitors annually. If Niagara County agritourist related businesses attracted a small fraction of those visitors it would be an enormous benefit to them and the communities they are located in. Similarly integrating agritourism into the Niagara Falls USA tourism efforts, similar to Canada's success in the Niagara region, would help increase the number of days visitors stayed in the Falls. This action would build upon Cornell Cooperative Extensions success in aggregating information and maps of farms and related outlets for farm products in Niagara County.

AWARENESS

Niagara County will promote the quality, variety, and importance of farm products and agriculture locally and regionally.

A-1 Launch a Family Farm Day in Niagara County that would include farm tours, rides, food/beverage tastings and other activities

As part of this project the Cornell Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau and LaBella Associates coordinated and hosted a Farm Tour with elected officials and other economic development partners in Niagara County. The tour was a success and could be replicated and built upon for a one day or weekend event that is open to the public. Schoharie, Otsego and Delaware County have a model for a Farm Day that is a joint effort of their respective CCE offices, tourism agencies and economic development partners: <http://cceschoharie-otsego.org/events/2018/08/25/family-farm-day>

A-2 Open a Farmers' Market and Taste NY retail location near the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute in the Niagara Falls Tourist district.

Capture some of the 8-10 million visitors that visit Niagara Falls annually by establishing a summer Farmers' Market on Falls Street adjacent to the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute. The summer Farmers Market could be complemented by a year round Taste NY retail site in the Culinary Institute building that would feature Niagara County food and beverage products. In turn, the market and Taste NY locations could have brochures or information on agritourist sites in the County to promote tourism in rural areas of Niagara County.

A-3 Develop a comprehensive ag-tourism marketing and branding campaign

Engage the services of a marketing firm to work with CCE and Niagara County economic development officials to build upon and promote the EatFresh including:

- Media campaign to promote the brand; and
- Promotion of local foods on local restaurant menus via the brand.

PROTECTION

Niagara County will protect land for agricultural production.

- P1 Develop a brochure and companion training component for local municipalities and farmers on how to update zoning/land use controls to promote agricultural economic development and protect valuable farmland

Many municipalities, even rural ones, do not have farmer or agricultural friendly zoning ordinances that help to protect and promote agricultural economic development. This brochure would provide information on how specific zoning or land use controls can encourage agricultural economic development and protect valuable farmland including restrictions on wind and solar projects. Similarly, the brochure will offer tips on farm friendly zoning techniques. A companion training program would also be developed for area municipalities and farmers.

- P2 Apply for Farmland Protection Implementation grants from New York State Agriculture & Markets to facilitate the purchase of development rights or conservation easements, including term easements

Municipalities can also apply for funding to develop a formal transfer of development rights program or to provide incentive payments for development rights or conservation easements through NYS Agriculture & Markets. Both programs offer farmers financial incentives to keep land in agriculture and discourage sales of prime agricultural land.

VIABILITY

Niagara County will facilitate the long term economic viability of agriculture.

- V1 Establish an agricultural packaging and processing program at Niagara County Community College

To complement the development of wholesale processing and distribution of Niagara County agricultural products a new program on agricultural processing and packaging could be established at Niagara County Community College. The training program would train the next generation of farmers and processors how to aggregate, process and distribute Niagara County farm products.

- V2 Obtain funding for small/new farmers

To continue the business and heritage of agriculture in Niagara County, funds should be obtained to help new farmers establish themselves. New farmers typically don't have the resources to start in the agriculture industry. Funding, including micro-enterprise grants, could be obtained by Niagara County to purchase land, buildings, equipment and to provide working capital.

V3 Advocate for robust funding to ensure Cornell Cooperative Extension can enhance its effectiveness

The Niagara County Cornell Cooperative Extension has been the principal advocate for agriculture and farming in Niagara County for decades. It provides support and educational seminars for those in the agricultural industry. It is also the coordinator of the Niagara County Fair. To continue its effectiveness funding should be obtained to maintain and grow its programs to promote agricultural economic development.

Recommendations were developed for each of the goals established by the Steering Committee. The number of recommendations are limited so they are achievable over the next decade and also have an impact on Niagara County's agricultural economic development.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE: PROTECTING FARMLAND AND AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

Climate change is not only impacting developed areas with flooding and major storm events. It is also significantly impacting farming and agricultural operations which are directly dependent on weather. According to a report prepared by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) entitled *Responding to Climate Change in New York* (as well as a Climate Change Fact Sheet prepared by Cornell University) there are several weather factors impacting agriculture including:

- Too little water or drought
 - Vulnerabilities/Opportunities - impacts livestock production (i.e. milk) and threatens the viability of cool weather crops (apples, potatoes, cabbage, etc.) and reduced yields or potential loss of crops.
 - Adaptation: - increase cooling in barns, increased irrigation, heat tolerant crop varieties,
- Too much water
 - Vulnerabilities/Opportunities - delays in planting, increased soil compaction, increased root disease and applied chemical run off.
 - Adaptation - flood resistant crops, install tile drains, increase organic matter in soil,
- Warmer summers, longer growing seasons
 - Vulnerabilities/Opportunities - helps to obtain higher yields but also increases weeds and insects.
 - Adaptation - shift planting dates, plant heat resistant crops and/or longer growing season varieties.
- Warmer winters
 - Vulnerabilities/Opportunities- increased weed and pests and potential for frost damage for certain crops for variable, changing temperatures.
 - Adaptation - new cash and cover crops, better freeze/frost warning systems, increased pest control.
- Extreme weather events
 - Vulnerabilities/Opportunities - complete loss of crops.
 - Adaptation - better climate science and associated warning systems

In short, anticipating and planning for a future of increased climate change will advance the goals to improve the long term viability of agriculture in Niagara County and protect farmland.

NIAGARA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

Recommendation		Timeframe	Responsibility	Funding
O-1:	Increase the number of meat processors in Niagara County.	2-5 years	CCE & Niagara County DED	ESDC, USDA, CDBG
O-2:	Establish or attract a cooperative produce distribution enterprise.	2-5 years	CCE & Niagara County DED	ESDC, USDA, CDBG
O-3:	Create an Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator in Niagara County.	2 years	Niagara County	USDA, County Budget
O-4	Integrate agritourism into Niagara County tourism activities, programs and direct consumer sales.	1 year	Destination Niagara USA	Destination Niagara USA
A-1	Launch a Family Farm Day in Niagara County that would include farm tours, rides, food/beverage tastings and other activities.	1 year	CCE	USDA, sponsorships
A-2	Open a Farmers' Market and Taste NY retail location near the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute in the Niagara Falls Tourist district.	5 years	Destination Niagara USA	Destination Niagara USA
A-3	Develop a comprehensive ag-tourism marketing and branding campaign.	1-2 years	CCE, Destination Niagara USA	ESDC Strategic Planning or Market NY grants
P1	Develop a brochure and companion training component for local municipalities and farmers on how to update zoning/land use controls to promote agricultural economic development and protect farmland.	1 year	CCE, Niagara County DED, municipalities	ESDC Strategic Planning or Market NY grants
P2	Apply for Farmland Protection Implementation grants from New York State Ag & Markets to facilitate the purchase of development rights or conservation easements.	Ongoing	Niagara County, CCE & municipalities	Niagara County, CCE & municipalities, NYS Ag & Markets
V1	Establish an agricultural packaging and processing program at Niagara Community College.	2-5 years	Niagara Community College	Niagara Community College
V2	Obtain funding for small/new farmers.	Ongoing	CCE, Niagara County IDA, SBDC, municipalities	CCE, Niagara County IDA, municipalities
V3	Advocate for robust funding to ensure Cornell Cooperative Extension can enhance its effectiveness.	Ongoing	CCE	CCE

Notes: Recommendations in **bold** are high priority projects; CCE – Cornell Cooperative Extension, DED – Department of Economic Development, IDA - Industrial Development Agency, SBDC - Small Business Development Center, ESDC – Empire State Development Corp, CDBG – Community Development Block Grant.

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**AGRICULTURAL AND
FARMLAND PROTECTION
PLAN**

NIAGARA COUNTY

**Section V:
High Priority
Projects**



NIAGARA COUNTY FARM FAMILY DAY



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A Farm Tour was held as part of the development of this plan and it was a great success. The tour included stops at a winery, a dairy, an apple orchard, and a CSA.

Using the Farm Tour as a model, as well as the Schoharie-Otsego Farm Family Day, Niagara County will hold an annual Farm Family Day. On one day in the summer, farms throughout Niagara County will open their doors to the public and offer samples of their products, tastings and tours of their facilities. Some farms with animals may also offer rides.

The one-day event offers a great opportunity to not only feature individual farms, but it will also raise the awareness of the importance of agriculture in Niagara County's economy.

MODEL: SCHOHARIE-OTSEGO FAMILY FARM DAY

The Schoharie-Otsego CCE coordinates the annual farm day in August with the Farm Bureau, Chambers of Commerce, tourism agencies and others. A guide to the farms and the event is published.

<http://cceschoharie-otsego.org/agriculture/familyfarmday>



NIAGARA COUNTY FARM FAMILY DAY

PROJECT COSTS

TOTAL ESTIMATED COSTS: \$ 50,000
Booklet Design/Layout: \$15,000
Booklet printing: \$15,000
Advertising: \$20,000

FUNDING SOURCES

USDA Local Food Promotion Grant: \$40,000
Sponsorships: \$10,000

STEERING COMMITTEE SUPPORT

The Family Farm Day was the third highest priority of the Steering Committee.

AG PLAN STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The project aligns with the following Ag Plan Strategies:

- Support agritourism
- Expand markets for local farm products
- Hold events to promote agriculture locally and regionally
- Market the County's products to local residents and the regional population
- Educate residents of all ages about the importance of agriculture

PROJECT BENEFITS

The project has the following benefits:

- Improves awareness of the importance of Niagara County agriculture.
- Introduces the region to farmers, farm products and agritourist locations.
- Spin off benefits will include visits to area restaurants, bars, retailers and a potential increase in accommodations.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Cornell Cooperative Extension would be the lead partner on the project. A key partner for the project is the Niagara County Farm Bureau. Other partners could include Destination Niagara USA, the Soil & Water District and area farmers.

TIMELINE & STEPS

Overall Timeline: 1 year

- Issue request for Farm Participation: 3 months
- Prepare booklet, coordinate sponsorships & coordinate farmers: 6 months
- Advertising: 3 months

AGRITOURISM BRANDING AND MARKETING



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Niagara County is one of the most visited sites in the world. However, there is limited promotion of agritourism within Niagara County. With the exception of the businesses that participate in the Wine Trail, there is not a coordinated, umbrella effort to promote other agritourism businesses in the County.

An Agritourism branding and marketing campaign could address the lack of a unified agritourism marketing approach. A branding and marketing campaign could include the development of a branding message for all businesses to use, a logo to identify Niagara County products in local restaurants and retail outlets, a multi-year marketing campaign, and training for businesses.

MODEL: DIG VT

The DIG VT is a multi-faceted agritourism marketing campaign at the State level but it provides a great example for Niagara County, which attracts almost as many visitors (10M vs 13M). <https://www.diginvt.com/>



AGRITOURISM BRANDING AND MARKETING

PROJECT COSTS

TOTAL ESTIMATED COSTS: \$ 500,000

Includes development of brand message, logo design, training and advertising for two years.

FUNDING SOURCES

USDA Local Food Promotion Grant: \$300,000

ESDC Market NY: \$150,000

NYSDOL Workforce Development: \$50,000

STEERING COMMITTEE SUPPORT

The agritourism branding and marketing program was the second highest priority of the Steering Committee.

AG PLAN STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The project aligns with the following Ag Plan Strategies:

- Support agritourism
- Expand markets for local farm products
- Market the County's products to local residents and the regional population
- Educate residents of all ages about the importance of agriculture

PROJECT BENEFITS

The project has the following benefits:

- Increases local outlets for food distribution.
- Improves pride in Niagara County and awareness of agriculture.
- Introduces the region to farmers, farm products and agritourist locations.
- Benefits restaurants that cater to "foodies" that prefer local products.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Cornell Cooperative Extension would be the lead partner on the project. Similar or Family Farm Day the Niagara County Farm Bureau would be an important partner. Other partners could include Destination Niagara USA.

TIMELINE & STEPS

Overall Timeline: 1-2 years

- Develop scope of work and issue RFP for advertising firms: 3 months
- Prepare and receive grant funding: 3-6 months
- Develop branding and marketing: 1 year
- Launch advertising, logo: 3 months

MUNICIPAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT FRIENDLY BROCHURE & TRAINING



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The focus of most municipal ordinances in Niagara County is on development of land instead of protection of important assets like farmland. A new brochure and online webpage would provide local municipalities with information on how to update zoning ordinances and other land use controls to promote agricultural development. The brochure would also provide information on land use techniques to protect farmland and discourage uses, including wind and solar projects, that may consume prime farmland. Simple graphics would provide information on basic regulations to update and the online webpage would have a library of model ordinances from communities to review and potentially review. A companion training component would also be developed for municipal boards.

MUNICIPAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT FRIENDLY BROCHURE & TRAINING

PROJECT COSTS

TOTAL ESTIMATED COSTS: \$ 50,000

Includes engaging a planning firm to prepare the content and graphic design for the guide as well as training for one year.

FUNDING SOURCES

USDA Rural Business Development Grant: \$50,000

STEERING COMMITTEE SUPPORT

The municipal brochure was the highest priority of the Steering Committee.

AG PLAN STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The project aligns with the following Ag Plan Strategies:

- Utilize Cornell Cooperative Extension as a resource to facilitate the viability of agriculture in Niagara County
- Educate residents of all ages about the importance of agriculture
- Assist local communities with zoning and land use controls that protect and promote agriculture, agriculture related businesses and agritourism.

PROJECT BENEFITS

The project has the following benefits:

- Raises awareness of the importance of agriculture.
- Improves the long term viability of agriculture economic development in municipalities.
- Reduces conflicts between farmers and residents.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Cornell Cooperative Extension would be the lead partner on the project. The Niagara County Center for Economic Development's planners could assist with development of the brochure.

TIMELINE & STEPS

Overall Timeline: 1 year

- Develop scope of work and issue RFP for planning firms: 1 month
- Prepare and receive grant funding: 3-6 months
- Develop brochure: 6-8 months
- Training: Ongoing after brochure launched.

OBTAIN FUNDING FOR NEW FARMERS AND SMALL FARMS



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

To incentivize younger farmers or new farmers to enter the agricultural career path funding is needed to assist them get started and grow. Funding would be for land or building acquisition, equipment and working capital. Assistance in the first 1-5 years is critical to ensure their success.

It is important to attract new and younger farmers to improve the long term sustainability of farming in Niagara County. Attracting younger farmers is critical as the average age of principal operators in Niagara County is 58 years of age according to the Census of Agriculture. New farmers could potentially come from all walks of life – retirees, veterans, students, and those changing careers.

OBTAIN FUNDING FOR NEW FARMERS AND SMALL FARMS

PROJECT COSTS

TOTAL ESTIMATED COSTS: \$ 25,000

Costs would be for development of a brochure on funding sources, distribution of the brochure and promotion of the information.

FUNDING SOURCES

- ESDC New Farmers Grant Fund: Funding up to 50% of project costs up to \$50,000 for equipment, working capital or building construction/renovation
- NYS Community Development Block Grant Micro-enterprise funding: up to \$200,000/awardee and up to \$35,000 per business (Niagara County has an existing program)
- USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program: Training funding of between \$300,000 - \$600,000
- ESDC Capital Funding: Provides up to 20% match; no limit.
- Niagara County EDC Revolving Loan Fund; Provides up to 33% of project costs up to \$200,000 for fixed assets.

STEERING COMMITTEE SUPPORT

Obtaining funding for farmers was the fourth highest priority of the Steering Committee.

AG PLAN STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The project aligns with the following Ag Plan Strategies: Provide opportunities for entrepreneurship including services for the next generation of farmers

- Support services for young and new farmers
- Utilize Cornell Cooperative Extension as a resource to facilitate the viability of agriculture in Niagara County

PROJECT BENEFITS

The project has the following benefits:

- Improves the long term viability of agriculture in Niagara County.
- Encourages younger farmers to stay in business and grow.
- Provides potential transition planning options to existing farmers.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Cornell Cooperative Extension would be the lead partner on the project and work with the Farm Bureau and Niagara County IDA.

TIMELINE & STEPS

Overall Timeline: Ongoing

- Develop brochure
- Promote via mailings, online presence, seminars and via economic development partners.